FLED IS THAT MUSIC?

Transposition versus transformation: theory and practice in the translation of poetry

Susan R Toye

A submission presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
of the University of Glamorgan/Prifysgol Morgannwg
for the Degree of Master of Philosophy by Portfolio in Writing.

May 2004

CONTENTS

...une traduction de poésies... peut être un rêve caressant, mais ne peut être qu'un rêve. [1]

Much has been written about the translation of poetry. It's all true.[2]

[1] "Translating poetry... is but a dream, albeit a beguiling one." Baudelaire, Charles, 'Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe', in *Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires par Edgar Poe*, Troisième Edition (Paris, Michel Lévy Frères, 1862), pp. xxiii-xxiv

[2] O'Grady, Desmond, *Trawling Tradition* (University of Salzburg, 1994), p.xii

Prelude

It is a commonplace nowadays to talk about what is lost in translation. This phrase, originally by Robert Frost, has served as the title for numerous books and most recently for an Oscar-winning film directed by Sofia Coppola. It is less usual, however, to discuss what is gained in translation, even though many thousands of books and poems written in many different languages have reached a far wider readership through the art of translation, enriching many more lives and influencing many more cultures. How many of us, for example, would have read Joseph Brodsky, Anna Akhmatova, Wang Wei or Umberto Eco without the invaluable efforts of the translator? Translation, therefore, is a crucial activity and one which plays an important part in the education and development of every country. Without it, as George Steiner remarks, we would be much the poorer, living "in arrogant parishes bordered by silence". [3]

There are many different types of translation, ranging from the often laughable productions of machine translation programmes, more commonly seen in the commercial and service sectors, to the craft of the literary translator. It could be said that the most skilled branch of this art is poetry translation, often the purview of poets and writers. Indeed, many would assert that no translator who is not a poet could possibly translate a work of poetry successfully. As Edna St Vincent Millay states in the preface to the translation of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* she produced with George Dillon:

> The poet best fitted, technically, to translate the work of a foreign poet, is the accomplished and disciplined craftsman in his own tongue, who possesses also a

[3] Steiner, George, quoted in Daniel Weissbort, 'A Ciceronian Up Against it!', *PN Review* (vol. 30, no. 5, May–June 2004), p. 68

comprehensive knowledge of the language from which he is translating.[4]

There is certainly no doubt that, as with the translation of any literary work, the translation of poetry brings into play numerous key issues, both general and specific. This is perhaps partly because form and content are inextricably linked in verse: in the case of a strongly narrative novel, for example, the story may be just as important, if not more so, than the means used in the telling of it, whereas in the case of a poem, the form itself may well carry part of the meaning.

In this critical paper, I intend first to give an overview of the main factors involved in the translation of poetry, then move on to a more detailed discussion of various translations of Charles Baudelaire's sonnet, *L'ennemi*, in an attempt to show how these factors influenced the individual translators in their lexical choices. My decision to use the work of this nineteenth-century French poet was in part based on his mastery of fixed form, vital for a discussion of formal constraints, and partly because the poem exemplifies many other challenges in terms of vocabulary, register and reception.

The translations employed in this paper are not intended to be representative of any single approach to translation, but are used to illustrate individual theoretical points. In fact, some make use of several strategies to achieve what the translator believed to be a successful translation. As Susan Bassnett remarks:

> Comparing translations can reveal all sorts of things. We can see how different translators have worked, what strategies they have employed, what choices they have made, and also how tastes alter over time and how readers' expectations vary.[5]

In actual fact, it is worth noting that no single translation can be regarded as

---

[4] Millay, Edna St Vincent, and George Dillon, *Flowers of Evil* (New York, London, Harper & Bros., 1936), p. xiii

[5] Bassnett, Susan, 'The Value of Comparing Translations', *ITI Bulletin* (July–August 2003), p. 20

completely distinct from another: every translation is influenced by prevailing literary and linguistic trends, by the translations that preceded it, and by the particular aims and concerns of the translator.

As with many of the existing discussions about the nature of translation, this essay hinges on the three basic approaches to translation defined (although not coined) by John Dryden: metaphrase (literal translation), paraphrase (latitude in translation) and imitation (abandonment of the source text to a greater or lesser degree). Although Dryden initially favoured the second, he later modified his position, described in his *Dedication of the Aeneis* (1697) as

> 'steer[ing] betwixt the two extreames of paraphrase and literal translation': understanding the spirit of the original author whilst adapting the translation to the aesthetic canon of the age. [6]

As I hope to show in this paper, some latitude is essential for a successful translation and the best translations are those which steer a course between word for word translation and an imitative version which is so far removed from the source text that the theme and spirit of the original are lost. However, whether any serious translator ultimately opts for metaphrase, paraphrase or imitation, one thing is sure: their strategy will reflect an informed choice revealing a variety of linguistic and syntactical concerns.

---

[6] Ellis, Roger and Liz Oakley-Brown, 'British Tradition', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. Mona Baker (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 340

Exposition

In late September 1987, Douglas Hofstadter sent out a challenge to over fifty friends challenging them to construct what they considered to be an *artistic equivalent* of a poem – *Ma Mignonne* by Clément Marot – in their native language. He supplied them with two literal translations and a list of formal properties:

The poem is 28 lines long.
Each line consists of three syllables.
Each line's main stress falls on its final syllable.
The poem is a string of rhyming couplets: AA, BB, CC,...
Midway, the tone changes from formal ('vous') to informal ('tu').
The poem's opening line is echoed precisely at the very bottom.
The poet puts his own name directly into his poem.[7]

This challenge, whose results were examined and discussed in Hofstadter's fascinating book about translation, *Le Ton Beau de Marot*, provides an excellent point of departure, since it summarises many of the key points that any serious translator of poetry needs to consider: content versus form, constraints, trade-offs, the creative process, drafts, revisions, abstract style, varieties of literality, etc. This critical paper will be examining many of these factors, all of which are brought into play when any translation activity is undertaken.

It is certainly true that with all types of translation, both literary and commercial, there are gains and losses and that some form of compromise has to be reached. With literary translation, particularly the translation of poetry, these compromises are thrown into starker relief. In fact, many poets and writers have exclaimed about the difficulty, if not the sheer impossibility, of translating poetry, all the while continuing

[7] Hofstadter, Douglas R., *Le Ton Beau de Marot* (New York, Basic Books, 1997), p. 1a

to attempt 'the impossible'. In his article 'Translating Poetry' ('La Traduction de la Poésie'), published in translated form in *PN Review 46*, the French poet, academic and translator, Yves Bonnefoy, asserts that the act of translating poetry is madness:

> The answer to the question, 'Can one translate a poem?', is of course no. The translator meets too many contradictions which he cannot eliminate; he must make too many sacrifices.[8]

He is right to a certain extent. The translation of poetry always involves a series of trade-offs, but then so do most acts of creative endeavour. Any proficient poet tackling a fixed form, for example, may at some time or another find themselves veering off in an unexpected direction due to the need for a specific rhyme or because the form does not allow him or her to explore the original impetus behind the poem. The fundamental difference, here, of course, is that a poet has the freedom to change direction, to abandon first intentions and set off in search of the unexpected. The translator, if he or she is attempting to produce a metaphrase or paraphrase, cannot do this. However, a translator can still enjoy a surprising amount of freedom, successfully weighing up the pros and cons of each compromise to come up with the best solution possible.

The first question which inevitably arises for any translator of more traditional poetry is whether form should be prioritised over content or vice versa. As Umberto Eco says:

> ...poetic texts are a sort of touchstone for translation, because they make clear that a translation can be considered absolutely perfect only when it is able in some way to provide an equivalent of the physical substance of expression.[9]

---

[8] Bonnefoy, Yves, 'Translating Poetry', in *PN Review 46* (Cambridge Poetry Festival Special Issue, vol. 12, no. 2, 1985), translated from the French by John Alexander and Clive Wilmer, p. 5

[9] Eco, Umberto, *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003), p.144

If, for example, the form is crucial to the overall effect of a poem – say, a sonnet – then to sacrifice it for a different form, or even for no form at all, would surely be detrimental to the poem and give readers a false impression of the poet's intentions. This extends further than the use of a fixed form and can cover such elements as the rhyme scheme, the use of specific phonemes, devices such as alliteration and assonance, etc., all of which contribute to the poem's sound-world and may form an integral part of its meaning. As Seamus Heaney remarks in his essay 'The Impact of Translation':

> It seems self-evident that what the reader who does not speak Russian experiences as the poem in translation is radically and logically different from what the native speaker experiences, phonetics and feelings being so intimately related in the human make-up.[10]

In other words, the way something is expressed – the nuts and bolts of a language – can often be fundamental to the poem's meaning and this can be lost when a different mode of expression is chosen. If, for example, a translator chooses to use the language of today – writing "alive English", as Lowell put it[11] – the translation becomes a contemporary piece of writing, despite the fact that the original may have been written in the nineteenth century. No poet writing today would want to produce an original work in the same vein or spirit as a poet writing in the last century or earlier. As T. S. Eliot remarks:

> Whether poetry is accentual or syllabic, rhymed or rhymeless, formal or free, it cannot afford to lose its contact with the changing language of common intercourse.[12]

However, if a translator wants to create something contemporary, following the do's

---

[10] Heaney, Seamus, 'The Impact of Translation', in *The Government of the Tongue* (London, Faber & Faber Ltd, 1988), pp. 38–39

[11] Lowell, Robert, *Imitations* (New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1989), p. xi

[12] Eliot, T. S., 'The Music of Poetry', in *On Poetry and Poets* (London, Faber and Faber Ltd, 1969), p. 29

and don't's of modern poetry by avoiding large abstract concepts, for example, and paring down the language to its essence, he or she may be criticised for falsifying the spirit of the source-language poem, thereby doing the original poet a disservice. Yet, of course, no translator and/or poet would want to produce something that did not stand as a fine poem in its own right, translation or not.

When discussing the various translations of stanzas from Dante's *Inferno*, Douglas Hofstadter singles out Seamus Heaney for criticism. Although praising the Irish poet for retaining the tercet, he concludes that Heaney fails on many other counts, not just because he ignores metre and rhyme, but also due to the poor quality of language used:

> In favour of Heaney, I can say that he renders a tercet by a tercet. It's good to see nine lines of gate inscription, instead of just seven. But, I regret to say, there's not much more praise that I can offer. Look at the first line: 'Through me it leads to the city sorrowful.' 'It'?! What is this 'it'? And 'city sorrowful' is pretty sorrowful. If this line had been written by a high-school student, I would have struck it out in bright red ink and said to start again from scratch. To my ear, the sentence doesn't even sound like it was written by a native speaker![13]

However, it might be argued that this was not the point and that Heaney was not being lax with language here. What he was doing, rather, was attempting to create an atmosphere and mindset that would alert the reader to the fact that this poem was written centuries ago in a different country with different cultural loci.

The debate about foreignisation (creating a translation which sounds like a foreign text) and domestication (creating a contemporary translation that appears to have been written originally in the target language) has been raging since the first translators began theorising about their art. St Jerome declared in a preface to his translation into Latin of the *Chronicle* of Eusebius:

---

[13] Hofstadter, *Le Ton Beau de Marot*, p. 535

> It is an arduous task to preserve felicity and grace unimpaired in a translation. A writer has chosen a word that forcibly expressed a given thought; I have no word of my own to convey the meaning; and while I am seeking to satisfy the sense I may go a long way round and accomplish but a small distance of my journey. Then we must take into account the ins and outs of transposition, the variations in cases, the diversity of figures, and, lastly, the peculiarities of the native idiom of the language. A literal translation sounds absurd; if, however, I am obliged to change either the order or the words themselves, I shall appear to have forsaken the duty of a translator.[14]

As an illustration of this polemic, note the debate between the nineteenth-century men of letters, Matthew Arnold and Francis Newman, with regard to translating Homer. Arnold asserted that Homer should be rendered in hexameters and in modern English to keep the translation in line with the current academic reception of the Greek text. Newman, however, not only constructed an archaic lexicon but also used an old ballad metre to show that Homer was originally a popular rather than elitist poet. Lawrence Venuti, who quotes this debate in his essay 'Strategies of Translation'[15] remarks that, ironically, Newman was foreignising for populist reasons while Arnold wanted to domesticate for academic and elitist reasons.

This brings us to another consideration: if the original poet's intentions are paramount, how literal should a translation be if the translator is to convey them faithfully. Should tone predominate over meaning or meaning over tone? Dryden was scathing about word for word translation or metaphrase, which he likened to walking a tightrope with bound feet:

> 'tis much like dancing on ropes with fettered legs: a man may shun a fall by using caution; but the gracefulness of motion is not to be expected: and when we have said the best of it, 'tis but a foolish task: for no sober man would put himself into a danger for the applause of escaping without breaking his neck.[16]

---

[14] Jerome, quoted in Susan Sontag, 'The World as India', *TLS* (June 13 2003), p. 13
[15] Venuti, Lawrence, 'Strategies of Translation', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, p. 243
[16] Robinson, Douglas, 'Metaphrase', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, p.153

Indeed, it is hard to see how any literary text can be translated word for word, without undermining the overall music and sense.

Every word in any one language has many levels of meaning and connotations which accrue as a result of the cultural and social profile of that particular country. Even English differs in register and application when used in different countries, so that translators not only have to consider their choice of words with regard to the source language with which they are working, but also with regard to their target language and target readership, if different. Whether sidewalk is a better translation for *trottoir* than pavement in terms of rhyme or metre will be irrelevant if the translator is not writing for an American English market: using such a word would strike the wrong note in a text destined for a UK readership and would be as jarring as an anachronism or inaccuracy.

In the introduction to *Imitations*, his anthology of translated European poetry, Robert Lowell implies that literal meaning is not as important as tone and quotes Boris Pasternak, saying that the reliable translator may well convey meaning but miss the tone[17], which is so crucial to poetry and to any literary endeavour worth its salt. Lowell admits that, in his attempt to produce contemporary poems based on European originals, he has been "reckless with literal meaning"[18].

If, then, the interpretation of the poem is subjective and there is no absolute 'literal' meaning, how is the translator ever to get it right? It seems, starting from this standpoint, that any translation of a poem will be a translation of the translator's interpretation of the poem and not necessarily that of the original poet's intention. This is why a translator must take context into consideration when translating the oeuvre of a particular poet. If he or she is translating a poem by a poet who was living in Nazi-occupied Poland, such as Czeslaw Milosz, then a knowledge of the

[17] Lowell, *Imitations*, p. xi
[18] Lowell, *Imitations*, p. xi

political conditions under which the poem was written, the political stance of the

poet as well as various other autobiographical details may be crucial to an accurate rendering of the poem. Added to this, the translator must have a deep feeling of empathy with the poet in order to convey what lies beyond what Eliot calls the "frontiers of consciousness"[19]. As Edna St Vincent Millay remarks: "All his [the translator's] skill, however, will not avail him, if he is not sufficiently in sympathy with the poem he is translating to feel that he might have written it himself."[20]

In light of the above, it seems impossible that any translator should undertake what Heaney calls the "sweet distress"[21] of translating poetry, but the challenge is hard to resist. In Douglas Hofstadter's view, translation is something like the interpretation of a musical score, but more ambitious, more adventurous:

> ...the truth is that, despite all the reverence for the original, a skilled literary translator makes a far larger number of changes, and far more significant changes, than any virtuoso performer of classical music would ever dare to make in playing the notes in the score of, say, a Beethoven piano sonata.[22]

However, if translation is like musical interpretation, then perhaps a concerto is a more apt comparison than a sonata. The movements could be seen as the original poem, interpreted by the soloist after a great deal of in-depth research, and the translation is then the cadenza: an opportunity for the performer to show off his or her virtuoso skills, creating a satisfying extended passage within the stylistic and linguistic framework of the original work.

---

[19] Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry', p. 30 (quoted in full, footnote 25, pp. 14–15)
[20] Millay, *Flowers of Evil*, p.xiii
[21] Heaney, Seamus, in conversation with Tim Marlow, *Newsnight Review* (2 April 2004)
[22] Hofstadter, *Le Ton Beau de Marot*, p. 365

Form: Point and Counterpoint

Although not necessarily so much of a problem with contemporary poetry, which is often written in free verse, the translation of poetry often stumbles when it comes up against the use of traditional or fixed forms, such as the sonnet. In his introduction to *Imitations*, Robert Lowell scathingly refers to metrical translators as "taxidermists, not poets", saying that their poems are "likely to be stuffed birds".[23] However, although it seems obvious that a first-class free-verse translation of a strictly formal poem is better than a poor metrical, rhymed translation, this represents an obvious loss in terms of music, reception and intent on the part of the original poet. The question is whether this loss is necessary or whether some attempt should be made to translate not only the content of the poem but also its chosen form. In the preface to her translation of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Edna St Vincent Millay remarks:

> To many poets, the physical character of their poem, its rhythm, its rhyme, its music, the way it looks on the page, is quite as important as the thing they wish to say; to some it is vastly more important.[24]

T. S. Eliot was also of the opinion that part of a poem's meaning could be found in the combination of sounds made by a poem, its music, rather than the actual words.

> It is a commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may wholly escape paraphrase. It is not quite so commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may be something larger than its author's conscious purpose, and something remote from its origins.... If, as we are aware, only a part of the meaning can be conveyed by paraphrase, that is because the poet is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist. A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant.[25]

---

[23] Lowell, *Imitations*, p. xi
[24] Millay, *Flowers of Evil*, p. vii
[25] Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry', p. 30

This does not merely apply to literary devices such as onomatopoeia, but to the entire sound-world of a poem. Sibilance, alliteration, the type of rhymes used, etc. all play their part in the meaning of a poem and can carry as much weight as the actual sense of the words. Viewed in this way, the 'music' created is not a loose, impressionistic by-product of the poem, but an integral part of its structure. As David Paul remarks in his introduction to his translations of French poetry:

> The meaning of the ideal poem could only be akin to that of music, self-contained, nonexplanatory, infinitely suggestive.... But music is not a question of magic sounds, or symbols; but of aural structure, of patterns of procedure through systems of repetition and development.[26]

Paul regards Baudelaire as a consummate musician, using "refrain, delayed or syncopated repetition, with results closer to music than that of any other poetry I know"[27] and, in fact, Baudelaire was often regarded as one of the forerunners of the Symbolist movement, which held that music was crucial to meaning. The much quoted opening of Paul Verlaine's *Art Poétique* (1874) – *De la musique avant toute chose*[28] – stresses the importance of the suggestive quality of music and its ability to transcend the surface of reality. Baudelaire regarded the poet as a seer who wielded the music of poetry to penetrate the façade of the real world and see beyond to the essence of the ideal world.

Baudelaire's sonnet, *L'ennemi*, occurs in the *Spleen et Idéal* section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the first edition of which contained one hundred poems divided into five varied sections: *Spleen et Idéal* (77 poems), *Fleurs du Mal* (12 poems), *Révolte* (3 poems), *Le Vin* (5 poems), and *La Mort* (3 poems). This 'ensemble' was published in 1857 and caused a furore which resulted in six of the poems being condemned as an "outrage à la morale publique et aux bonnes moeurs" (offence against morality and

---

[26] Paul, David, *Poison and Vision, the Poems and Prose of Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Rimbaud* (University of Salzburg, 1996), pp. xvii–xviii

[27] Ibid, p. xviii

[28] "Music above all else", quoted in Charles Chadwick, 'French Symbolism', 2003, [http://skku.ac.kr/~leems/FrenchSymbolism.hmtl.htm], (22.03.2004).

decency). In discussing these key formal issues, and those relating to content in the next chapter, I shall be examining several translations of this poem in versions by Robert Lowell, Edna St Vincent Millay, Richard Howard and Francis Scarfe, focusing mainly on the first quatrain due to pressure of space.

Although revolutionary in his subject matter, Baudelaire was no great innovator when it came to form. His contemporaries, Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud, exercised far greater formal freedom and, in fact, the latter is regarded by many as one of the forerunners of the Surrealist movement in his willingness to allow the poem to develop its own shape without the conscious intervention of the poet. In 1871, Rimbaud condemned much of traditional French poetry as *prose rimée* (rhymed prose), advocating a looser type of poetry which would allow the poet's genius free rein. Baudelaire, however, was more of a purist[29], favouring the stately twelve-syllable alexandrine – also known as iambic hexameter – named after a twelfth-century poem called *Le Roman d'Alexandre*. This metre is very common in an inflected language such as French, but rare in English, although occasionally used in an extended form of blank verse or in heroic couplets.

Consequently, the first decision a translator of Baudelaire has to take when working on, say, one of his sonnets, is whether to use alexandrines or another metrical form such as iambic pentameter, which is used in English with the same frequency as the alexandrine and to similar effect. In his book on translating poetry, Burton Raffel states categorically that no decent translator would choose to retain the alexandrines when translating a traditional French poet like Baudelaire: "No two languages having the same prosody, it is impossible to re-create the prosody of a

[29] It is interesting to note that he dedicated *Les Fleurs du Mal* to Gautier, a champion of technical discipline.

literary work composed in one language in another language."[30] Not that Raffel approves of translators who opt unthinkingly for iambic pentameter which, he claims, being a feet-based metre, not a syllabic one, cannot have the balanced cadence of the alexandrine with its medial caesura. The result is what he disparagingly calls 'dogtrot prosody'[31]. Raffel advocates instead the use of a metrical mixture to preserve a basic formal framework, adjusting it line by line to reflect the imperatives of the English translation. This, I would argue, although better than a free-verse translation, cannot do justice to Baudelaire's mastery of form and does not begin to convey the tension skilfully created between traditional form and innovative content.

Another consideration is the rhyme scheme used in the original. If a translator decides to abandon metre and rhyme entirely for free verse, he or she also has to weigh up the pros and cons of writing in a style that may or may not be incompatible with the original poet's intent. This is particularly true of a fixed form like the sonnet. As Louis MacNeice commented, the shape of a poem is half its meaning, and a form like a sonnet has a long history and meaning in its own right. As Paul Fussell explains:

> The fact that... [the sonnet] has meaning as a form alone is demonstrated by such a historical phenomenon as its lack of popularity among poets in the eighteenth century. These poets were acute enough to sense not merely that the sonnet as a form tends to imply a particular, highly personal, usually somewhat puzzled or worshipful attitude toward experience, but also – and more importantly – that they did not possess that attitude nor could affect it convincingly.[32]

---

[30] Raffel, Burton, *The Art of Translating Poetry* (University Park and London, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), p. 83
[31] Raffel, *The Art of Translating Poetry*, p.88
[32] Fussell, Paul, quoted in Raffel, *The Art of Translating Poetry*, p. 64

Not only does historical context affect the formal choices made by contemporary poets, it also has a bearing on the approach taken by a translator with regard to a poem that may have been written a century or more earlier. When faced with a sonnet, for example, a translator may feel uncomfortable reproducing a form that no longer reflects contemporary tastes and fashions. He or she may feel that the poet would have chosen a different form had he been writing in their era and take a decision to change or abandon the form altogether. This is a strategy adopted by several of the translators examined in this critical paper.

Baudelaire's sonnet *L'ennemi* was written in alexandrines with a regular rhyme scheme (ABAB CDCD EEF GFG) which, although not commensurate with the traditional rhyme scheme of the French sonnet (ABBA ABBA CCD EDE), was perfectly acceptable by the mid nineteenth century:

> Ma jeunesse ne fut // qu'un ténébreux orage,
> Traversé çà et là // par de brillants soleils;
> Le tonnerre et la pluie // ont fait un tel ravage
> Qu'il reste en mon jardin // bien peu de fruits vermeils.[33]

The stately metrical pattern and fixed form adds to the melancholy effect of the poem and sets the mood beautifully. The alternating rhymes underpin the contrasting themes in the poem – light and dark, hope and despair, happiness and misery, life and death – while the alexandrine offers great scope for a variety of stresses. The caesura traditionally falls at the end of the 6th syllable, dividing the line into two equal *hémistiches* (hemistiches). Although poetical convention required that the break at the caesura should be one of meaning as well as sound, many poets, particularly from the early nineteenth century onwards, tended to

[33] Baudelaire, Charles, *Complete Verse* (London, Anvil Press Poetry, 1986), p. 69 (see Appendix 1, p. 52, for full text)

ignore this along with the traditional rhyme scheme, making the alexandrine much more fluid. Nevertheless, the overall effect is one of balance, similar to that created by the English iambic pentameter.

Edna St Vincent Millay was convinced that it was necessary to maintain the original form, declaring:

> To translate poetry into prose, no matter how faithfully and even subtly the words are reproduced, is to betray the poem. To translate formal stanzas into free verse, free verse into rhymed couplets, is to fail the foreign poet in a very important way.[34]

Her decision to preserve the poem's "anatomy", an approach which obviously makes the translator's job that much harder, can be hugely rewarding and avoids committing one of the many "impertinences" involved in re-writing another person's poem:

> It is true that the translator, who is hard put to it enough in any case to transpose a poem from one language into another without strangling it in the process, here takes upon himself an added burden; but he is more than rewarded when he finds that his translation, when read aloud directly after the original, echoes the original, that it is still, in some miraculous way, the same poem, although its words are now in a different language. [35]

It may be because of this decision that her version of the sonnet is, in my opinion, more successful. The pleasing rocking rhythms echo those of Baudelaire's French, not only because of her use of alexandrines, but also because she places her caesuras more or less around the middle of the twelve-syllable lines: in the first quatrain, on syllable 6 of the first two lines and on syllables 8 and 9 in the third and fourth lines:

---

[34] Millay, *Flowers of Evil*, p. vii
[35] Millay, *Flowers of Evil*, p. x

I think of my gone youth // as of a stormy sky

Infrequently transpierced // by a benignant sun;

Tempest and hail have done their work; // and what have I? –

How many fruits in my torn garden? // – scarcely one. [36]

Yet she is not slavish in her use of form, recognising that the alexandrine is not a natural metre to use in English:

> Being thus handicapped from the outset in our enterprise of making English verse sound like French verse, being obliged to force English words into a metrical scheme where they had not so far been signally happy, we soon found that we often came much closer to the effect we wanted by importing into the twelve-syllable line – wherever, due to certain unavoidably accented words, it seemed bumpy and unbalanced – one or two (infrequently three) extra syllables, still always keeping the line, however, a line of six feet.[37]

In Richard Howard's blank verse rendering, the caesuras fall respectively after syllables 5, 6, 6, 5, in the first four lines, forming a satisfying pattern that does much to underpin the balanced feel of the iambic pentameter:

My youth was nothing // but a lowering storm
occasionally lanced // by sudden suns;
torrential rains have done // their work so well
that no fruit ripens // in my garden now. [38]

This pattern is replicated throughout the poem with the caesuras falling roughly around syllable 6 in lines which are roughly iambic varied by dactyls and trochees, so that the overall rhythm is very measured and pensive, making this a good reflection of the mood of the French poem.

One of the weakest of these translations in terms of rhythm is the 'imitation' by Robert Lowell. Ironically, although he declares that he does not approve of

---

[36] Ibid., p. 250 (see Appendix I, p. 54, for full text)
[37] Ibid., p. xx
[38] Baudelaire, Charles, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, translation by Richard Howard (London, Everyman's Library, 1993), p. 31 (see Appendix I, p. 55, for full text)

strict metrical translation, he also seems chary of falling into the trap of producing "a sprawl of language, neither faithful nor distinguished"[39]. As a result, his version attempts a rough syllabic pattern in place of the alexandrines:

> My childhood was only // a menacing shower,
> cut now and then // by hours of brilliant heat.
> All the top soil was killed // by rain and sleet,
> my garden hardly bore // a standing flower.[40]

Although in the main he uses 10-syllable lines, these vary between 9 and 12, with the caesura falling anywhere between syllables 4 and 7. This is unfortunate, to my mind, as although the poem starts out well enough, the overall impression is not one of measured melancholy and ineluctability. It has a more modern feel, perhaps in keeping with the poet's stated aim of creating a new original written in the language of "now". However, given that Lowell has opted for a loose syllabic form coupled with a rhyme scheme and has based his poem closely on the French, one has to wonder why he chose not to close the distance between original and version. The translation is not far enough away from Baudelaire's original to be "partly self-sufficient and separate from its sources"[41]. It is clearly a translation with as many points of difference and similarity as the other two versions examined here, but a less successful one for all that.

If we turn now to the matter of rhymes, we can see from the translations of the first stanza, for example, that there are diverse variations. As mentioned above, Baudelaire's first stanza uses a rhyme scheme of ABAB, alternating masculine and feminine rhymes. My comparison here centres on the versions by Millay and

---

[39] Lowell, *Imitations*, p. xi
[40] Ibid., p. 52 (see Appendix I, p. 53, for full text)
[41] Lowell. *Imitations,* p. xi

Lowell. The prose translations of Baudelaire's poems by Francis Scarfe do not pretend to take any account of the music of the poems and he makes no apology for this. As he notes in his preface, these translations serve "a useful purpose for many overseas readers"[42] – the emphasis is on clarity of meaning, not the weight of the words, the tone or the inherent music of the poem – and, in fact, he reminds us that Baudelaire chose to translate Poe's verse into prose and that this translation has remained the standard one in the French language.[43] Richard Howard's blank verse rendering of the poem has no end rhymes, although he makes effective use of internal chimes and echoes as in the stuttering quality of the 'u's and 'd's of "suns/done/sudden", the finality of the 'n's in "sudden/done/garden/ripen" and the assonantal echoes such as "lowering" and "now", "youth" and "fruit" or "lanced" and "garden", which set the mood of the poem and accentuate the elaborate system of comparisons and contrasts in the first quatrain.

Although Millay does not use Baudelaire's rhyme scheme, she opts for a cross between the Italian and English sonnets, keeping Baudelaire's structure of two quatrains and two tercets as in the Italian sonnet and using the usual rhyme scheme of the English sonnet with only a slight variation in the first tercet: ABAB CDCD EEF FGG. Being more regular in its application of sonnet protocol and thereby keying into the traditional connotations of this form, Millay already gives her version of Baudelaire's poem greater resonance. There is a feeling of inevitability which draws the reader through the poem to the satisfying final rhyming couplet. It would be meaningless within the context of an English translation to attempt an alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes and, in

[42] Baudelaire, *Complete Verse*, p. 46
[43] Baudelaire, *Complete Verse*, p. 46

fact, Millay only uses one feminine rhyme in the whole sonnet – the last rhyme of the poem and, consequently, of the rhyming couplet – which gives the poem a dying fall, very much in keeping with the theme.

Robert Lowell, on the other hand, opts for a rhyme scheme which, although reproducing the pattern of the French in the first stanza, soon lapses into something else again: ABBA CCDD EFG EGF. As was the case with his use of syllabics, there appears to be no organic reason for this rather awkward attempt to recreate a rhyme scheme. In fact, as Lowell admits, "My Baudelaires were begun as exercises in couplets and quatrains..."[44], and the rhymes seem to work more as a jumble of isolated rhymes rather than a definite form forging its way through to what should be a satisfying close. The first four lines, which are the most compelling of the translation, offer a nice alternation of male and female full rhymes – "shower/flower", "heat/sleet" – which lend the poem a rhetorical power that soon dissipates. The effect is very much as if the poet, although starting out with the best intentions, soon abandoned all pretence at a structured rhyme scheme due to the necessary compromises, so that the poem ends with the consonantal rhyme of "food/blood", which is more eye rhyme than ear rhyme. Apart from the two feminine rhymes in the first four lines, there is only one other in the first line of the first tercet – "survives" – but this appears to be there by accident only, unless it is to heighten the uncertainty of the question. It is perhaps unfair to criticise Lowell for not meeting criteria that he spent several pages of an introduction dismissing, but one cannot help feeling that Lowell might have produced a better 'imitation' had he not used rhyme.

There are many other formal considerations to consider when aiming to translate a

[44] Lowell. *Imitations*, p. xiii

foreign language poem. Baudelaire, for example, made much use of phonetic structures to create the music of his poems, such as the repetition of certain phonemes at the beginning and end of a line or around a caesura. Take, for example, the first line of the sonnet:

Ma jeunesse ne fut // qu'un ténébreux orage

As we can see, there is a phonetic equivalence between the first and last sound units ("ma j/age"), which creates a balanced musical effect. This also occurs in the fourth line:

Qu'il reste en mon jardin // bien peu de fruits vermeils.

where not only do "en mon" and "peu de" present a pair of internal rhymes, but there is a phonetic echo on either side of the caesura with the 'in' of "jardin" and the 'ien' of "bien". These intricate patterns of repetitive sounds combine to create a compelling music which any serious translator must in some way emulate to create the same type of effect.

To my mind, the most successful of the translations in terms of the internal music of the lines is that by Richard Howard, possibly because, having eschewed end rhymes, he has concentrated more closely on recreating Baudelaire's music by other means. The repetition of the 'th' sounds in the first line, the chiming 'u' sounds in "nothing but" (these two either side of the caesura), "sudden", "suns", "done", the echo of the first vowel sound of "occasionally" and "torrential", the pattering 'r' sounds in "lowering", "torrential", "rains", "work", "fruit", "ripens" and "garden", are some of the means Howard uses to carry forward the musical momentum of the stanza.

There are the same sort of internal chimes in Lowell's version of the first four lines, but there are fewer of them. We have an internal echo between "hours",

"shower" and "flower", between the first syllable of "brilliant" and "killed", and perhaps between "and then" and "standing", but the overall effect is far less musical. Millay too has some internal rhymes and echoes, but quite probably needs fewer because her metre and rhyme work so much harder than in the previous two translations. She makes use of sibilance, as in "stormy", "sky", "transpierced", "sun", "tempest", "fruits" and "scarcely", while there are echoes between "stormy" and "torn", "have done", "garden" and internal rhymes between "done", "one" and "sun", as well as "gone", which is more of a consonantal rhyme.

The "anatomy" of a poem, its shape on the page, is, in this case, the two quatrains and two tercets of a sonnet, emulated by all the poets discussed here, but there are other visual elements which a translator ignores at his or her peril. The different types of punctuation used, for example, are significant. Following the convention of the time, the first word of every line of Baudelaire's sonnet is capitalised. Given that poets tended to stop capitalising the first word in a line around the mid twentieth century and that this trend is often associated with free verse rather than formal verse, this factor should always be considered. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Lowell is the only poet examined here who elects not to capitalise his lines, despite adhering to a more or less metrical form. By doing this, he is signalling that this is a twentieth-century poem, the product of a twentieth-century mind. All well and good, but one has to wonder whether he has moved far enough away from Baudelaire's nineteenth-century mindset and concerns. The poem still has a rather old-fashioned feel, despite his declared aim of writing "alive English". The use of abstract concepts like "time" and "nature", or "my mind's autumn", the barely conversational tone and the form create something that is sub-Baudelaire and sub-Lowell and the rejection of capitals for the first words in the line feels more like the easy acceptance of a prevalent modern convention, than a considered act.

Other types of punctuation may signal a change of tone or emphasis and are as

much part of the form as rhyme or metre. Take the dash, for example, at the beginning of the last tercet: "– Ô douleur! Ô douleur". This not only indicates that there is a shift in mood – from hope to despair – but also highlights the fact that this tercet answers the question raised by the previous one. None of the translations examined here has preserved the dash. Millay's translation is, as ever, the closest to the French. She keeps the exclamation of despair, which is clearly in answer to the previous question, and loses none of the power of the change in mood, despite her disposal of the dash which, it might be argued, is not entirely necessary, given the end-stopped line break and a new stanza. Lowell asks his questions in the first two lines of the last tercet, then dissipates the tension by commenting on the questions in the last line of that tercet before moving on to a less despairing final tercet, which seems more matter of fact and resigned in tone than the original. Howard opts for a different type of punctuation entirely at the end of the first tercet: three dots, or what is known in French as a 'point de suspension' and in English as an ellipsis. In this version, the question is rhetorical and the ellipsis indicates an interruption or trailing off, increasing the sense of helplessness and resignation. The final tercet is therefore seen as a continuation of this mood, not an upsurge of despair and anguish, which undermines the power of the final image.

Punctuation is also governed by convention and the use of such signs as the exclamation mark has roughly the same emphasis in French and English. However, French writers tend to be far more liberal in their use of exclamation marks than English writers and consequently care has to be taken when translating that these are not dotted randomly around the text. They are used in the French poem very much as a rhetorical device, lending emphasis. It is interesting, in this respect, to note that while Robert Lowell, in his attempt to make Baudelaire more modern, has abandoned all exclamation marks (although he has doubled the number of question marks), Richard Howard has kept one up his sleeve for the end of the last line.

Although Baudelaire uses it at the end of his last line as an emphatic device, its appearance at the end of the blank verse version by Howard seems at best redundant and at worst something that undermines the gravity of the ending. It seems strange that he has removed the other rhetorical devices in the poem – the question and the exclamation about the horror and pain inflicted by Time's ravages – but has preserved this at the end. It adds nothing to the poem and one has to wonder what extra emotion or emphasis Howard intended to convey by putting it there.

It is obviously not enough to wield a form successfully or to imitate the visual layout of a poem on the page if rhyme, metre and content fall by the wayside. However, even if a poet and translator manages to meet many of the formal challenges, he or she still has to contend with the mood and content of the poem, which may well be skewed by the necessity of maintaining a rhyme scheme or shaving off corners to fit the poem into a fixed form. In light of the obvious difficulties of getting it right in all categories, Mark Musa, an American Dante scholar and translator, wryly admits, in the translator's note to his unrhymed translation of Dante: "I believe that all those who have offered rhymed translations of Dante could have produced far better poems if they had not used rhyme."[45] This is a perfectly acceptable stance, so long as the poet does not regard free verse as an opportunity to take liberties with actual meaning. The next chapter, therefore, will examine considerations inherent in translating the content of a poem.

[45] Musa, Mark, quoted in Hofstadter, *Le Ton Beau de Marot*, p. 537

Content: Theme and Variations

If it is not intended to be an imitation, no metrical or formal translation of a poem can be deemed successful if it is not faithful to the meaning. Firstly, however, the translator has to decide whether the 'meaning' resides in the literal sense of the individual words on the page or their sum. Thus, when translating a text, the translator first has to look at the author's intention, the impression he or she wanted to make, and why he or she chose one specific word over another, one specific image over another. The translator may also need to take into account the political, social and cultural context of the work to determine the weight and register of certain words or phrases. As Umberto Eco remarks in his recent book, *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*:

> In order to understand a text, or at least in order to decide how it should be translated, translators have to figure out the possible world pictured by that text. Often they can only make a hypothesis about that possible world. This means that a translation is also the result of a conjecture or of a series of conjectures. Once the most reasonable conjecture has been made, the translators should make their linguistic decisions accordingly. Thus given the whole spectrum of the content displayed by the dictionary entry (plus all the necessary encyclopaedic information), translators must choose the most suitable or relevant meaning or *sense* for that context. [46]

The translation of poetry, therefore, entails paying particularly close attention to the weight of certain words and their meaning, although formal, metrical and musical constraints often mean that it is impossible to provide a word for word translation or metaphrase.

Even in a literal prose translation, if such a thing were possible, the tone, spirit and overall thrust of the poem should be conveyed as accurately as possible. I say "if such a thing were possible", because the very term 'literal translation' is misleading: there is very rarely only one way to translate a particular word and any decision will

be based on an understanding of context, which is also open to interpretation. The French word *langue*, for example, can mean 'language' or 'tongue' in the linguistic sense and 'tongue' in the anatomical sense. To complicate matters further, if a translator were to come across the phrase 'il tirait la langue' in a poem, he would have to take the overall scenario into account before he would be able to translate it correctly, since the idiom means variously 'he stuck out his tongue', 'he was dying of thirst', or 'he was green with envy'. As Douglas Hofstadter remarks:

> The creation of 'literal' translations, although at first blush much less exciting than the creation of 'artistic' ones, actually poses some of the most fascinating challenges. Just how literal is literal?... I myself have done five 'literal' translations so far...[47]

Unfortunately, unlike the Monty Python sketch about the joke used to deadly effect in World War II after being translated into German by individual translators, each working on one word in seclusion so that none was felled by its lethal power, every word in the translation of a poem has a bearing on the one before it and the one after it.

The prose translation of the Baudelaire sonnet, *l'ennemi*, by Francis Scarfe, highlights some of these problems. Scarfe is already limited by the fact that he obviously wanted to provide a short prose version of each poem at the base of the page on which it appeared. No leisure then to do as Millay recommends in her preface with regard to the prose translation of a poem:

> The person setting out to translate metrical verse into prose has an entirely different kind of work to do. Not being constrained at all by rhyme or meter, permitted to use, if he finds it necessary or even convenient, forty lines of prose as against twenty lines of poetry, it is definitely his business to give us what is known as a "literal" translation.[48]

---

[46] Eco, *Mouse or Rat?* p. 20
[47] Hofstadter, *Le Ton Beau de Marot*, p. 8
[48] Millay, *Flowers of Evil*, p. xxi

Scarfe's prose version or 'crib' of the first four lines reads as follows:

> My youth was nothing but a glowering storm, pierced here and there by brilliant shafts of sun; thunder and rain have so ravaged my garden that very few rosy fruits survive.[49]

One of the main problems with producing a truly literal translation is that the use of modifiers such as adjectives and adverbs can be very subjective, particularly those relating to colour and mood. The first problem with this version, then, is Scarfe's translation of "ténébreux". This adjective has a host of interconnected meanings and it is very hard to opt for one without sacrificing the others, so the optimum choice would be one that satisfies as many criteria as possible. *Ténébreux* in French means variously dark, gloomy, mysterious and obscure and relates to 'tenebrous' in English. The English word, however, is much less commonly used in English than *ténébreux* is in French, so to employ the former (as Arthur Symons does[50]) might create a rather abstruse effect, not in keeping with the tone of the poem. The French word also has connotations linking it to the devil and the realm of the dead, as in *l'Ange ténébreux* (dark Angel) or the *ténébreux séjour* (the shades). Scarfe uses the word "glowering", whose main level of meaning centres around 'anger' or 'sullenness' and also echoes the more usual 'louring' when talking of gloomy, cloudy weather. However, I would maintain that this is the wrong register entirely. It brings in an element of vindictiveness or bad-temperedness which is not the case with "ténébreux": the mood associated with this adjective is melancholy, not anger. "Glowering" does not conjure up the necessary images of darkness either, despite its echoes with 'louring', as the suggestion of 'glow' contained therein adds an unwanted hint of colour (supported by the suggestion of red-faced anger), which works against the required darkness and interferes not only with the contrast of the brilliant shafts of sunlight in

---

[49] Baudelaire, *Complete Verse*, p. 69

[50] Baudelaire, Charles, *Les Fleurs du Mal, Petits poèmes en prose, Les paradis artificiels*, translated by Arthur Symons, (London, The Casanova Society, 1925), p.112 (see Appendix I, p. 56, for full text)

the next line, but that of the 'vermilion' fruit in the fourth line.

And what of the colour *vermeil*? The French word, which translates as bright red, cherry red or rosy (when applied to complexion) is a much brighter colour than simple *rouge* and, in fact, the English word 'vermilion' belongs to much the same register of meaning, having been used in the manufacture of red sealing wax, for example. "Vermeils" is also rhymed with "soleil", which enhances the sense of warmth and radiance. The image of bright red fruit standing out against the dark greens and earth colours of the garden is visually very striking and conveys the poet's sense of loss. He has only seen flashes of brilliant sunshine and there are only a few bright fruits left in his garden. The stark contrast between success and failure, happiness and misery, is encapsulated by this contrast between light and dark, colour and monotone. Francis Scarfe, who has no metrical or rhyming constraints, chooses to translate "vermeils" by "rosy". I find this a little too pale to provide a successful contrast. The word conjures up a fresh pink, the blushing cheeks of youth perhaps, but I think that Baudelaire intends a stronger contrast here.

If we then move onto the treatment of these two adjectives in the versions examined in the previous section, we can see that the constraints of rhyme and metre have taken their toll. None of the versions chooses to point up the contrast in colour and tone found in the French. Howard goes furthest along this route by using the verb "ripen" which carries the suggestion of colour, but perverts the sense to a certain extent. The line categorically states that there is no fruit, ripe or ripening, in his garden. This I think misses the poignancy of Baudelaire's statement that only a very few scarlet fruits remain after the ravages of time – he has something to show for the years of struggle, a few hard-won trophies, but little indeed remains. Both Millay and Lowell ignore the use of colour here entirely. Lowell opts for the image of flowers mostly beaten down by harsh weather, which is more successful in that it retains the image of few objects of beauty remaining, as well as conveying a hint of

colour, since flowers are rarely dull. Millay also successfully conveys the image of a garden decimated by the weather, but uses far fewer concrete images than the French and adds questions where there are none in the French which leads to a slight shift in tone. Whereas the French is more resigned and bitter in mood and descriptive in content, Millay's version is rather more rhetorical with its repeated questions and lacks the visual punch of the original.

The solutions found for the first adjective, "ténébreux", are just as varied. Millay opts simply for "stormy sky", changing the French noun "orage" (storm) into an adjective to modify the noun "sky" which does not appear in the French. Does comparing youth to a "stormy sky" differ greatly from comparing it to a dark storm? I would argue that it does, considerably. A stormy sky is overcast, certainly, but does not necessarily result in rain or hail. The image also has a distancing effect: being the storm itself or being something that heralds a storm are very different propositions, the former being far more compelling a comparison. Millay continues this shift in tone with her description of the sunshine. In her version, the sun is "benignant", a rather archaic word meaning "benevolent" or "gracious". Gone are the dazzling periods of sunlight that illuminate Baudelaire's dark days and bathe the garden of his youth in life-giving heat. Millay's kindly sun penetrating the storm clouds of her sky lacks the intensity and vividness of Baudelaire's original. Lowell fares better with his "brilliant heat", which has all the force and light of the original, but opts for a "menacing shower" to translate Baudelaire's dark storm. Whether this choice was dictated by rhyme or not, I would maintain that it distorts the tone and meaning of the poem. Firstly, his choice of "shower" is, to my mind, unsatisfactory. A shower is something light and of short duration, a nourishing source of moisture that refreshes the soil, and even though Lowell modifies it with an adjective like "menacing", this does not convey the turbulence and darkness of Baudelaire's storm. In fact, it sounds unhelpfully paradoxical. Can a shower really be menacing? And, although youth is

seen here as a turbulent period that has caused havoc in the poet's life to date, I think the verb "menacing" goes too far in that it has connotations of intent, ill will. In Baudelaire's poem, youth is almost seen as a force of nature, something that brings about disaster unwittingly – it is merely going about its business, bringing rain and wind in its wake. In Lowell's version, youth becomes a wilfully self-destructive force that 'menaces' the garden of life, that sets out to harm it, and this, I believe, is just one of many distortions of meaning in his version.

Richard Howard's version is the best in this respect. He uses the verb "lowering" for "ténébreux", which is an alternative spelling for 'louring' and as such conveys both the darkness of an overcast sky and, although it has connotations of anger and sullenness, avoids the pitfalls associated with 'glowering'. His sibilant "sudden suns" also convey a sense of bright shafts of sunlight and, while there is no direct reference to the radiance of the sunshine, the sound of the phrase allied with its meaning somehow conjures up the image of bright sun after rain with gentle breezes caressing the foliage. This impression is also strengthened by the use of the verb "lanced", which, although introducing a somewhat medical image (which points up the beneficial, almost purgative, effect of the sun), also suggests a spear-like shaft or ray of sunlight.

A successful translation of a poem, however, relies on much more than a meticulous and informed choice of individual words and, although a translator should be faithful to the meaning of a poem, he or she should not treat the text as an inviolable, preserving images or content when this clearly works against its meaning. As Yves Bonnefoy remarks in his essay on translating poetry:

> We should in fact come to see what motivates the poem; to relive the act which both gave rise to it and remains enmeshed in it; and released from that fixed form, which is merely its trace, the first intention and intuition (let us say a yearning, an obsession, something universal) can be tried out anew in the other language. The exercise will now be the more genuine because the same difficulty manifests

> itself: that is to say, as in the original, the language (*langue*) of translation paralyzes the actual, tentative utterance (*parole*). For the difficulty of poetry is that language (*langue*) is a *system*, while the specific utterance (*parole*) is *presence*. But to understand this is to find oneself back with the author one is translating; it is to see more clearly the duress that bears on him, the manoevers of thought he deploys against it; and the fidelities that bind him.[51]

This approach is radical, perhaps too radical, since it calls for a fresh act of creation stemming from the generative poetic impetus. Taken to its logical conclusion, this approach may result in an 'imitation', rather than a paraphrase, because it advocates starting from scratch to produce a new poem that follows the original creative criteria. Nevertheless, it is often impossible to achieve a 'living' translation without altering the original text and there are many interpretative decisions involved in what Umberto Eco calls the "game of faithfulness".[52] It is permissible, argues Eco, to translate the "micro-propositions" of a text but not the "macro-propositions." In other words, in certain circumstances, a translator may have to change an image, idiom or pun because it is simply untranslatable, taking the view that the choice of image, the act of making a pun or the use of a colloquial saying are more important than the actual phrase in question. This is particularly relevant to the use of humour in poetry.

While not impossible to get around a joke or pun in a long text, such as a novel, by paraphrasing or even by adding a footnote, this is not a feasible step in a poem as it would ruin its anatomy and music. It is necessary therefore to determine the reason for the joke or wordplay and attempt to recreate the effect in the target language, so that the overall impact of the poem is sustained. See the notes on my translation of the text by Belgian writer and critic Jan Baetens, 'Alberto Breccia', in Appendix II, p. 68 for a further exploration of this type of problem.

The type of interpretative decision made to sustain the mood, tone and register of a poem by ignoring or discounting literal terms used is one aspect of what is known

---

[51] Bonnefoy, 'Translating Poetry', p. 6
[52] Eco, *Mouse or Rat?*, p. 73

as domestication. The decision whether to domesticise or foreignise (the opposite activity) is an important consideration in the translation of a poem. This quandary is succinctly expressed by Eco:

> Should a translation lead the reader to understand the linguistic and cultural universe of the source text, or transform the original by adapting it to the reader's cultural and linguistic universe? [53]

In other words, the serious translator must decide whether to produce a version which reproduces the atmosphere of, say, a nineteenth-century poem, or to create something which might appear to have been written in the translator's own era.

Both activities have their virtues and their advocates. In the case of a general text, for example, or a longer literary text, the use of footnotes can prevent the need to move too far away from the source text. A translator might then decide to keep proper nouns, forms of address or place names in the source language to create a sense of foreignness and to highlight the fact that he or she is producing a translation of a work originating in a very different country and culture. As Susan Sontag notes:

> ...if a translation from, say, French or Russian into German sounds as if it were originally written in German, the German-speaking reader will be deprived of the knowledge of otherness that comes from reading something that actually does sound foreign.[54]

It is harder to keep this sense of "otherness" in a poem, where every word counts and where constraints of metre and rhyme make it impossible to expand or explain. In terms of the Baudelaire sonnet we have been examining, I would say that Millay's version comes closest to foreignisation. Not only does she preserve the French sonnet form, the alexandrines and much of the layout and punctuation, as we have seen, but

---

[53] Eco, *Mouse or Rat?*, p. 89
[54] Sontag, 'The World as India', p. 14

the vocabulary she uses is less contemporary in register, creating an effect that is both 'foreign' and somewhat old-fashioned. To cite just a few examples of this, we have "transpierced" and "benignant" in the second line of the poem, both of which are derived from old French and sound strange to the modern ear. Later on in the poem, she gives a literal translation of Baudelaire's "mystique aliment", again using a word, 'aliment' which is not in frequent use and derived from old French, and in the last line, we have "battens", also of the same derivation. These touches, coupled with the fact that Millay follows the *dénouement* of the French poem and endeavours to preserve its "anatomy", leave the reader in no doubt that he or she is faced with the translation of a foreign poem that is not of this time. This makes Millay's version all the stronger, both as a translation and as a piece of writing in its own right.

The aim of domestication, on the other hand, is to enable the reader to appreciate the text or poem as a piece of writing in his or her own language. The advantage of this is to remove any obstacles to understanding and any possible knee-jerk reaction against reading a 'foreign work'. The text or poem appears to have been written in the target language and the reader can then appreciate the vision and thrust of the poem more fully and, it is argued, more directly. The forefather of translation, St Jerome, who translated the Scriptures, among other texts, was very much in favour of domestication, perhaps not surprisingly given that the meaning of the Scriptures had to take precedence over their literary merit. In a letter to Pammachius, in AD 395, he declared that the correct way to translate was by "keeping the sense but altering the form by adapting both the metaphors and the words to suit our own language."[55]

Politically and creatively, however, the act of domestication is a minefield. This is particularly true of 'minority' languages, such as Welsh. Dr Grahame Davies, the

[55] Sontag, 'The World as India', p. 13

Welsh poet, translator and critic, expresses the crux of this problem:

> Some would say the art should take precedence over communal concerns; some would say that the artistic impulse will demand precedence irrespective of the demands of the individual conscience. That may well be true of other artists, but to me the art is and should be secondary to the cause. The cause being the preservation of one particular part of the precious cultural diversity of the world.[56]

Domestication is like colonialism or globalisation: the dominant majority subsumes the minority until the latter's culture becomes assimilated and is lost. In more individual terms, if taken too far, the act of domestication can erase everything about a particular text that makes it the product of a particular writer producing work in a particular country at a particular time. The vision may be preserved along with some of the images, but the voice of the poet may be lost. This is the real pitfall in the production of what is known as imitations, rather than translations. Lowell's *Imitations* came in for a great deal of criticism for this very reason. As Thom Gunn remarked in a review of *Imitations*:

> Hugo's suave gestures similarly become spasmodic jerks, Villon takes on the flat clinical sound of the "confessional" poems in *Life Studies*, and others I am not able to read in the original, Homer and Pasternak for example, all speak with the unmistakable voice of Robert Lowell. Preserving the tone of most of these poets is, in fact, the last thing he has succeeded in doing.[57]

It could be argued, of course, that Lowell had no intention of preserving the spirit and mood of his author's works. What he wanted to do, as he said in his introduction, was to "write alive English and to do what my authors might have done if they were writing their poems now and in America."[58] In other words, he wanted to create poems which were only loosely based on the originals, a fact borne out by A. Alvarez, who called it a "magnificent collection of new poems by Robert Lowell,

---

[56] Dr Grahame Davies, 'Sleeping with the Enemy: the Tensions of Literary Translation', paper given at *The Politics of Literary Translation* conference, University of Glamorgan, 28 June 2003
[57] Gunn, Thom, 'Imitations and Originals', in *The Yale Review* (vol. 51, no. 3, Spring 1962), p. 481
[58] Lowell, *Imitations*, p. xi

based on the work of 18 European poets".[59] The title of Lowell's version of Baudelaire's *L'ennemi* clearly shows his intention. Unlike the other versions we have examined here, Lowell's is the only one to bear a different and, it might be argued, more contemporary title. He called his poem 'The Ruined Garden' (no doubt lifting the phrase from Arthur Symons' translation of the poem[60]), shifting the emphasis from the rather abstract universalised subject of the poem, Time the Enemy, to the object, the individual unable to escape the predations of time. It also introduces religious Christian connotations with the idea of a lost paradise, which may or may not be germane: the French poet introduces a religious aspect with the "mystique aliment", but it is by no means certain that this is Christian rather than more generally spiritual and he certainly does not foreground this theme by putting it in the title. The individual perspective is continued throughout the poem: in the second stanza, for example, Lowell alters Baudelaire's universal "automne des idées" to the more personal "my mind's autumn" and, in the last stanza, Lowell censors Baudelaire's impassioned cry "Ô douleur! Ô douleur!", as being far too strident for modern verse. By introducing 'nature' into the equation, he weakens the French poet's accusation that Time (personified, with a capital T) is devouring life like some blood-sucking vampire. This is surely a weak move, interfering with the movement of the sonnet, which is an extended metaphor based on the dual aspect of natural forces and the cycle of the four seasons. The first two quatrains of the poem are devoted to the idea that youth is like a bright summer interspersed with many stormy episodes (or a storm illuminated by bright periods), maturity is compared to autumn faced with the onset of winter (and death, with the mention of "tombeaux" or

[59] Alvarez, A., *Observer* (May 26, 1962), in Ian Hamilton, *Robert Lowell, A Biography* (London, Faber & Faber Ltd, 1983), p. 292
[60] See Appendix I, p. 56

graves). The hope of renewal with the poet's "fleurs nouvelles" (new flowers, recalling the title of the collection, the *Flowers of Evil*) in the first tercet is then shattered with the impassioned cry of despair in the second tercet. Time, "l'obscur Ennemi", which recalls Blake's "invisible worm", is an omnipresent, malignant and personified force in Baudelaire's poem. Lowell dilutes this concept by adding "nature" as one of the adversaries with which man must contend. In addition, as if that were not enough, although "l'obscur Ennemi" is intended to qualify Time in Baudelaire's poem, Lowell adds a further adversary, a far more contemporary "virus" (although, ironically, his version predates the AIDS epidemic), which might be time, nature, or something else instead. The result is not so much a contemporary take on a nineteenth-century theme, a powerful new poem loosely based on the French source, but a rather lacklustre imitation that dilutes the universal, emotive power of the original and, as a result, is not a particularly compelling poem.

As can be seen by the previous two chapters, the translations examined above have their strengths and weaknesses. These result from the particular translation strategies employed, the aims of each individual translator and the prevailing trends at the time they were writing. It is also impossible to ignore the influence of other translations: translation is rarely an isolated activity and few translators work in a vacuum. Most translations are therefore generally interlinked, since most practitioners will have perused other existing translations of the same work before or after attempting their own. This means, as Susan Bassnett correctly remarks: "Once a work has been translated, subsequent translators are producing versions not just of the original, but of preceding translations."[61] Whether this is a conscious or unconscious process depends on the individual author. One example of this process may be Lowell's title for *L'ennemi*, which was, in all likelihood, taken from the Symons translation. Whether he meant it as an intertextual reference, a tribute to

Symons (unlikely, since there appear to be few overt references to the latter's version), or whether the phrase innocently lodged itself in his memory is unknown, but it would be stretching the bounds of possibility too far to assume that Lowell decided on 'The Ruined Garden' independently. It might therefore be fair to say that Lowell's poem is as much a version of Symons' translation as of the Baudelaire, despite the fact that the two have so few points in common. In fact, Lowell seems wilfully determined to eschew solutions used in previous translations, as in the first line for example: "orage" is translated by 'storm' or 'stormy' in all the other versions examined here, whereas Lowell opts for the somewhat inapt 'shower'.

Subsequent versions of a translation may tend to move further and further away from the source-language text, particularly if it is written in a 'minority' language or one that is less well-known, forcing the translator to rely on the work of another translator or on other translations for their comprehension of it. This process, which bears similarities to the game of 'Chinese whispers', may result in what Dryden regarded as the other extreme in translation: 'imitation'.

Imitation is perhaps the ultimate in domestication: a version written 'after' a foreign source, which can move as far from the original text as the author requires. Virtually synonymous with the term 'free translation', imitation is where, in Dryden's words: "the translator, (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion."[62] When taken to its logical conclusion, this is no longer translation and becomes another type of creative endeavour altogether. Imitations can parody, subvert or expand the theme of the source text, providing a commentary on it, and, as Dryden suggests, may not be regarded as proper translations. In fact, many

---

[61] Bassnett, Susan, 'The Value of Comparing Translations', p. 20
[62] Dryden, John, preface to Ovid's *Epistles*, in Douglas Robinson, 'Imitation', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, p. 111

imitations, or poems written 'after' a source-language work have been written with little or no knowledge of the source language. These aspects of 'free translation' will be examined in the final chapter of this critical paper.

There is a very thin line between an avowed translation, a rendering of a poem from one language into another, and a version of the original, a new poem in its own right. When domestication is taken to such lengths that the original poet becomes invisible – in other words, the diametrical opposite of what Lawrence Venuti called the translator's invisibility – the work produced can no longer be seen as a faithful translation, since it may amplify on, distort or even subvert the spirit of the original. In the true 'imitation', the original, foreign language poet vanishes, his or her 'voice' is lost and the poem becomes a construct from another time and place. An example of how this process may begin can be seen in the second quatrain of Arthur Symons' translation of Baudelaire's *L'ennemi.* Here is Baudelaire's original, followed by the translation by Symons:

> Voilà que j'ai touché l'automne des idées,
> Et qu'il faut employer la pelle et les râteaux
> Pour rassembler à neuf les terres inondées,
> Où l'eau creuse des trous grands comme des tombeaux.

> Now that I have touched the autumn of Ideas,
> One must use the spade before the whole earth consumes
> Itself like the strangled sons that were Medea's
> Where the water digs deep holes as damp as tombs.

Quite apart from various inaccuracies or infelicities in the translation, this quatrain contains a huge departure from Baudelaire's original: "the strangled sons that were Medea's". Such a leap of the imagination leads one to wonder whether it was suggested, at least initially, by the need to find a rhyme for "Ideas". Baudelaire would never have allowed a rhyme to draw attention away from his theme: his skilled use of form was always at the service of the poem's sense. One therefore has to ask what or who is being served by importing the mythological and classical framework surrounding Medea who, deserted by Jason, kills their two children in an

act of revenge. Suddenly, in Baudelaire's poem, where Time is the enemy and the earth seems to represent human life, another character emerges: a vengeful, female presence, the Earth personified, who devours her offspring as Medea murdered her sons. A clear line of reference is thus opened to the Greek tragedy by Euripedes and the versions of *Medea Slaying Her Children* painted by Delacroix, the first of which was exhibited at the Paris Salon exhibition in 1838, adding a fearsome new protagonist to Baudelaire's cast of players.

There is no doubt that the French poet will have been familiar with the painting since he wrote an essay on Delacroix after seeing his work at the Salon of 1855, a couple of years before the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* was published, but Medea's appearance in a translation of *L'ennemi* seems completely gratuitous; all the more so, because according to the myth, Medea murdered her children by stabbing them, not by strangulation. Surely this is another poem: the use of the mythological image derails the process of the source-language poem, interfering with the extended natural metaphor and introducing extraneous material, which was probably more in keeping with Arthur Symons' tastes. It is worth pointing out in this respect that Symons, Verlaine's friend and contemporary, introduced Symbolism into the anglophone world with his 1899 book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, and he would have seen Medea as a powerful symbol of destruction. When all is said and done, it seems to be Arthur Symons' voice we are hearing through these lines rather than Baudelaire's, and this is where the distinction between translation and version becomes blurred.

Domesticating to the point of creating something new may well be related to the fact that the translation of poetry tends to call for the skills of a poet or perhaps a 'poet manqué'. Translating poetry is a highly specialised field and few translators without poetic skills are equipped to understand the factors involved and what is at stake. As Lowell remarked: "Poetic translation – I would call it an imitation – must

be expert and inspired, and needs at least as much technique, luck and rightness of hand as an original poem."[63] In other words, while it could be argued that a translator does not have to be a poet in his or her own right to do a good job translating a poem, it is essential that they are able to make the necessary creative leaps if they are to produce something viable in the target language. As Seamus Heaney has remarked with regard to his recent translation of *Antigone*, translation can be "a form of writing by proxy"[64], and it is hard for a poet or aspiring writer to suppress any egotistical concerns, any internal censors, to produce something that satisfies his or her own creative impulses and yet stays faithful to the original. In fact, as Yves Bonnefoy admits, it is virtually impossible to keep the two processes – original creation and creative translation – separate:

> Indeed, practically, if the translation is not a crib, nor mere technique, but an enquiry and an experiment, it can only inscribe itself – write itself – in the course of a life; it will draw upon that life in all its aspects, all its actions. This does not mean that the translator need be in other respects a "poet". But it definitely implies that if he is himself a writer he will be unable to keep his translating separate from his own work.[65]

There is a danger, therefore, that the translator, who may also be a poet and writer, will find that his or her creative concerns end up at variance with those of the foreign-language poet and he or she may then decide to spur off in another direction, using the poem in the source language as the starting point for a creative enterprise that, apart from the original impetus, is theirs alone. It is a tempting prospect since, as Seamus Heaney commented on a separate occasion: "You get the high of finishing something but you don't have to start it".[66]

Writing versions is, of course, not a new practice. Take, for example, Catullus'

---

[63] Lowell, *Imitations*, p. xii
[64] Heaney, *Newsnight Review*, 2 April 2004.
[65] Bonnefoy, 'Translating Poetry', p. 5
[66] Seamus Heaney with Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Readings & Conversations', 1 October 2003, [http://www.lannan.org/_authors/heaney/SHeaney_Conversation.pdf], 6 April 2004

fifth song[67], originally written in Latin in the first century BC. Writers as diverse as Sir Walter Raleigh, Thomas Campion and Ben Jonson[68] produced versions loosely based on the thirteen-line original (Raleigh's, in fact, was a four-line epigram), while Richard Crashaw[69] produced a more or less literal translation which was by far the least interesting.

Robert Lowell's stated aim, as we have seen, was to write new originals loosely based on the work of eighteen European poets. As the observation made by George Steiner on the back cover of the book shows, Lowell's book is about Lowell, his choices and his interpretations of other poets whose voices were not regarded as sacrosanct, more as fodder for new poems:

> The book has a twofold fascination: it gives access to the private realm of a major poet, showing us how he reads his masters and peers... At the same time it provides the reader with ... creative echoes to a number of important poems.[70]

The fact that he fell short of his goal in this endeavour, at least in terms of Baudelaire's *L'ennemi*, is probably due to the fact that he did not take the process far enough – he fell between two stools, somewhere between paraphrase and imitation.

Whether an imitation can stand alone as a work in its own right depends on whether there is enough new and original material in the poem and whether there is a good reason for using someone else's oeuvre as a starting point. Don Paterson has realised many imitations of foreign-language poets. In the afterword to his book of poetry based on the work of Antonio Machado, Paterson explains that he was interested in writing poems that reflected the aims and themes held dear by the

---

[67] *The Poems of Catullus*, translated by James Michie, (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), p. 24 (see Appendix I, p. 58, for full text)
[68] Texts given in 'The Wondering Minstrels', 2004, http://www.cs.rice.edu/~ssiyer/minstrels/index.html], 29 April 2004 (see Appendix I, pp. 59–61, for full texts)
[69] Crashaw, Richard, [http://www.cs.rice.edu/~ssiyer/minstrels/poems/1463.html], 29 April 2004 (see Appendix I, p. 62, for full text)
[70] George Steiner, quoted on rear jacket of Lowell, *Imitations*.

Spanish poet and recommends the reader in search of an accurate translation to look elsewhere:

> ...in writing these versions I initially tried to be true to a poem's argument and to its vision - if not its individual images - and to the poetic conventions of the language in which I was writing, rather than to its lexis.... This quickly became the more familiar project of trying to make a musical and argumentative unity of the material at hand, and this consideration, in overriding all others, led to mangling, shifts of emphasis, omission, deliberate mistranslation, the conflation of different poems, the insertion of whole new lines and on a few occasions the writing of entirely new poems.[71]

This approach probably takes the concept of imitation as far as it can go without losing touch entirely with the work of the original poet. The concept, for example, of adding two or three poems together to make an entirely new poem, faithful to the spirit and aims of the original poet, within the context of a collection of poems revolving around the same theme, seems as much homage as imitation and the end product can and should be regarded as independent from the original.

Translations and their imitations have had and always will have a continuing impact on the cultural mind of any society. It is impossible to know how T. S. Eliot's and Ezra Pound's work would have changed without the witty and ironic influence of Jules Laforgue, for example, and the latter's influence extends to the present, through the medium of his translators and 'versionists'.

One has only to look at the titles and dedications of certain poems based on Laforgue's 'L'hiver qui vient'[72] to appreciate this. Martin Bell wrote an excellent translation full of lively paraphrases – 'Winter Coming On (A caricature from Laforgue)'[73]– which is true to the spirit and tone of the original. Sean O'Brien

---

[71] Paterson, Don, *The Eyes* (London, Faber and Faber Ltd, 1999), p. 56

[72] Laforgue, Jules, *Poems*, translated by Peter Dale, (London, Anvil Press Poetry Ltd, 2001), p. 386 (see Appendix I, p. 63, for full text)

[73] Bell, Martin, 'Winter Coming On (A caricature from Laforgue)'in *Penguin Modern Poets 3: George Barker, Martin Bell, Charles Causely* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1962), pp. 65–68 (see Appendix I, p. 64, for full text)

later responded with 'After Laforgue (In memory of Martin Bell)'[74], which follows the general movement of Laforgue's poem, but is less ironic and more bitter in tone being far more scathingly political than the original, and as much as anything else a tribute to Martin Bell. The most recent version is 'The Beginning of Winter (after Laforgue, Bell and O'Brien)'[75] by the contemporary Anglo-American poet, Tamar Yoseloff. This latter poem would certainly not have been possible without the previous versions of the Laforgue, whose emotions are translated into a different language again, one that is recognisably female and anti-war. We have thus moved from Laforgue's quirky language and witty ironies touching on political and social discontent, through far more coruscating social comment, to a telling picture of a modern world at war – a journey spanning over a century and yet, if anything, highlighting the commonality between different sensibilities and different eras. There can be no greater recommendation for the art of translation, whether metaphrase, paraphrase or imitation.

[74] O'Brien, Sean, 'After Laforgue (In memory of Martin Bell)' in *Cousin Coat: Selected Poems, 1976–2001* (London, Picador, 2002), pp. 109–111 (see Appendix I, p. 65, for full text)
[75] Yoseloff, Tamar, 'The Beginning of Winter (after Laforgue, Bell and O'Brien)', unpublished, 2004 (see Appendix I, p. 66, for full text)

Coda

As I hope the preceding chapters have shown, the art of translating poetry is fraught with difficulty and a good translation is hard to achieve. There are many strategies for dealing with the challenges of translating poetry and innumerable problems that can only be partially solved by the deployment of these strategies. There can also be few hard and fast rules when it comes to translation: each case merits a fresh approach and may entail the use of various strategies in tandem. As W. S Merwin says:

> I continue in the belief, you know, that I don't know how to translate, and that nobody does. It is an impossible but necessary process, there is no perfect way to do it, and much of it must be found for each particular poem as we go.[76]

As can be seen from the versions of Baudelaire's sonnet examined in this critical paper, few translations are perfect: all represent gains and losses and every reader will probably have his or her favourite, depending on their tastes and requirements. Neither is a translation a substitute for the original: few readers who know and love a poem in its original incarnation will prefer its translation, however good it may be.

Despite the many difficulties, however, and the "sweet distress" of attempting to get it right, the art of translation is essential for the majority of people who do not possess other languages and for whom Wallace Stevens' remark that French and English constitute a single language is unfortunately untrue. As Sarah Lawson remarks with regard to translating Jacques Prévert:

---

[76] Merwin, W. S., quoted in Connolly, David, 'Poetry Translation', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, p. 171

> ...I think it is important to make a stab at even the supposedly 'untranslatable' text, because the alternative to a possibly flawed translation is no translation at all.[77]

Not only does translation widen our horizons and open us up to a great deal of human

experience that would otherwise pass us by, but it allows us to appreciate the genius of other writers and poets and shapes our culture.

A good translation of a poem is one in which, to hijack once again Robert Frost's dictum, the poetry is not lost in translation. It is the point where one writer's skill and craft are placed in the service of another poet's voice and vision and where ego is tempered by tact. As George Steiner says: "Without modesty translation will traduce; where modesty is constant, it can transfigure."[78] If a translator is too obsequious, too invisible, the result can be little better than metaphrase; if he or she is too bound up with their own concerns and their own reputation, the result can be a poor imitation, neither a good translation nor a work of startling originality. However, when the translator has the skill to wield his or her own language effectively and the humility to listen closely to what the source language poet is really saying, then the resulting paraphrase in the target language can work almost as well as the original poem.

If, then, as Robert Frost says in a letter of 1916, "A complete poem is one where an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words", then a good translation can be expected to do no less. When the translation of poetry works, as Don Paterson says, it is "something like piano transcriptions of guitar music"[79]: the medium and sound-world may be different, but the theme and emotion remain unchanged.

---

[77] Lawson, Sarah, 'Translating Jacques Prévert's Wordplay', in *In Other Words* (London, The Society of Authors, Summer 2003, no. 21), p. 2

[78] Steiner, George, 'Two Translations', in the *Kenyon Review* (no *23*, 1961), in Ian Hamilton, *Robert Lowell, A Biography*, p. 291

[79] Paterson, Don, *The Eyes* (London, Faber and Faber Ltd, 1999), p. 58

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

(Source Texts)

L'ennemi

Ma jeunesse ne fut qu'un ténébreux orage,
Traversé çà et là par de brillants soleils;
Le tonnerre et la pluie ont fait un tel ravage
Qu'il reste en mon jardin bien peu de fruits vermeils.

Voilà que j'ai touché l'automne des idées,
Et qu'il faut employer la pelle et les râteaux
Pour rassembler à neuf les terres inondées,
Où l'eau creuse des trous grands comme des tombeaux.

Et qui sait si les fleurs nouvelles que je rêve
Trouveront dans ce sol lavé comme une grève
Le mystique aliment qui ferait leur vigueur?

– Ô douleur! ô douleur! Le Temps mange la vie,
Et l'obscur Ennemi qui nous ronge le coeur
Du sang que nous perdons croît et se fortifie!

Charles Baudelaire

The Ruined Garden

My childhood was only a menacing shower,
cut now and then by hours of brilliant heat.
All the top soil was killed by rain and sleet,
my garden hardly bore a standing flower.

From now on, my mind's autumn! I must take
the field and dress my beds with spade and rake
and restore order to my flooded grounds.
There the rain raised mountains like burial mounds.

I throw fresh seeds out. Who knows what survives?
What elements will give us life and food?
This soil is irrigated by the tides.

Time and nature sluice away our lives.
A virus eats the heart out of our sides,
digs in and multiplies on our lost blood.

Translated by Robert Lowell

The Enemy

I think of my gone youth as of a stormy sky
Infrequently transpierced by a benignant sun;
Tempest and hail have done their work; and what have I? –
How many fruits in my torn garden? – scarcely one.

And now that I approach the autumn of my mind,
And must reclaim once more the inundated earth –
Washed into stony trenches deep as graves I find
I wield the rake and hoe, asking, "What is it worth?"

Who can assure me, these new flowers for which I toil
Will find in the disturbed and reconstructed soil
That mystic aliment on which alone they thrive?

Oh, anguish, anguish! Time eats up all things alive;
And that unseen, dark Enemy, upon the spilled
Bright blood we could not spare, battens, and is fulfilled.

Translated by Edna St. Vincent Millay

The Enemy

My youth was nothing but a lowering storm
occasionally lanced by sudden suns;
torrential rains have done their work so well
that no fruit ripens in my garden now.

Already the autumn of ideas has come,
and I must dig and rake and dig again
if I am to reclaim the flooded soil
collapsing into the size of graves.

I dream of new flowers, but who can tell
if this eroded swamp of mine affords
the mystic nourishment on which they thrive...

Time consumes existence pain by pain,
and the hidden enemy that gnaws our heart
feeds on the blood we lose, and flourishes!

Translated by Richard Howard

L'Ennemi

My youth was nothing but a storm, tenebrous, savage,
Traversed by brilliant suns that our hearts harden;
The thunder and the rain had made such ravage
That few of the fruits were left in my ruined garden.

Now that I have touched the autumn of Ideas,
One must use the spade before the whole earth consumes
Itself like the strangled sons that were Medea's
Where the water digs deep holes as damp as tombs.

But who knows if the flowers I dream of and adore
Shall find in this soil naked as any shore
The mystic nourishment of the magician's art?

– O Sorrow! Time eats our life and mortifies himself,
and the obscure Enemy who gnaws our heart
From the blood we lose increases and fortifies himself!

Translated by Arthur Symons

Carmen Quinque

Vivamus mea Lesbia, atque amemus,
rumoresque senum severiorum
omnes unius aestimemus assis!
soles occidere et redire possunt:
nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux,
nox est perpetua una dormienda.
da mi basia mille, deinde centum,
dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,
deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum.
dein, cum milia multa fecerimus,
conturbabimus illa, ne sciamus,
aut ne quis malus inuidere possit,
cum tantum sciat esse basiorum.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

5

My Lesbia, let us live and love,
And not care tuppence for old men
Who sermonise and disapprove.
Suns when they sink can rise again,
but we, when our brief light has shone,
Must sleep the long night on and on.
Kiss me: a thousand kisses, then
A hundred more, and now a second
Thousand and hundred, and now still
Hundreds and thousands more, until
The thousand thousands can't be reckoned
And we've lost track of the amount
And nobody can work us ill
With the evil eye by keeping count.

Translated by James Michie

My Sweetest Lesbia

My sweetest Lesbia, let us live and love,
And though the sager sort our deeds reprove,
Let us not weigh them. Heaven's great lamps do dive
Into their west, and straight again revive,
But soon as once set is our little light,
Then must we sleep one ever-during night.

If all would lead their lives in love like me,
Then bloody swords and armor should not be;
No drum nor trumpet peaceful sleeps should move,
Unless alarm came from the camp of love.
But fools do live, and waste their little light,
And seek with pain their ever-during night.

When timely death my life and fortune ends,
Let not my hearse be vexed with mourning friends,
But let all lovers, rich in triumph, come
And with sweet pastimes grace my happy tomb;
And Lesbia, close up thou my little light,
And crown with love my ever-during night.

Thomas Campion

Come, My Celia

Come, my Celia, let us prove
While we may, the sports of love;
Time will not be ours forever;
He at length our good will sever.
Spend not then his gifts in vain.
Suns that set may rise again;
But if once we lose this light,
'Tis with us perpetual night.
Why should we defer our joys?
Fame and rumor are but toys.
Cannot we delude the eyes
Of a few poor household spies,
Or his easier ears beguile,
So removed by our wile?
'Tis no sin love's fruit to steal;
But the sweet theft to reveal.
To be taken, to be seen,
These have crimes accounted been.

Ben Johnson

The sun may set and rise,
But we, contrariwise,
Sleep, after our short light,
One everlasting night.

Sir Walter Raleigh

Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love,
and let us count the opinion of censurious old men as a penny.
Suns can set and rise again:
our brief light only sets
and then there is an endless night for sleeping.
Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred,
then another thousand, and a second hundred,
then a thousand and a hundred over and over again
then when we will have kissed that many thousand times,
even we will not know how many,
and no one who wishes us ill because he is envious, can hold against us
the kisses he cannot count

Translated by Richard Crashaw

L'hiver qui vient

Blocus sentimental ! Messageries du Levant !...
Oh, tombée de la pluie ! Oh ! tombée de la nuit,
Oh ! le vent !...
La Toussaint, la Noël et la Nouvelle Année,
Oh, dans les bruines, toutes mes cheminées !...
D'usines....

On ne peut plus s'asseoir, tous les bancs sont mouillés ;
Crois-moi, c'est bien fini jusqu'à l'année prochaine,
Tant les bancs sont mouillés, tant les bois sont rouillés,
Et tant les cors ont fait ton ton, ont fait ton taine !...

Ah, nuées accourues des côtes de la Manche,
Vous nous avez gâté notre dernier dimanche.

Il bruine ;
Dans la forêt mouillée, les toiles d'araignées
Ploient sous les gouttes d'eau, et c'est leur ruine.

Soleils plénipotentiaires des travaux en blonds Pactoles
Des spectacles agricoles,
Où êtes-vous ensevelis ?
Ce soir un soleil fichu gît au haut du coteau
Gît sur le flanc, dans les genêts, sur son manteau,
Un soleil blanc comme un crachat d'estaminet
Sur une litière de jaunes genêts
De jaunes genêts d'automne.
Et les cors lui sonnent !
Qu'il revienne....
Qu'il revienne à lui !
Taïaut ! Taïaut ! et hallali !
Ô triste antienne, as-tu fini !...
Et font les fous !...
Et il gît là, comme une glande arrachée dans un cou,
Et il frissonne, sans personne !...

Allons, allons, et hallali !
C'est l'Hiver bien connu qui s'amène ;
Oh ! les tournants des grandes routes,
Et sans petit Chaperon Rouge qui chemine !...
Oh ! leurs ornières des chars de l'autre mois,
Montant en don quichottesques rails
Vers les patrouilles des nuées en déroute
Que le vent malmène vers les transatlantiques bercails !...
Accélérons, accélérons, c'est la saison bien connue, cette fois.

Et le vent, cette nuit, il en a fait de belles !
Ô dégâts, ô nids, ô modestes jardinets !
Mon coeur et mon sommeil : ô échos des cognées !...
Tous ces rameaux avaient encor leurs feuilles vertes,
Les sous-bois ne sont plus qu'un fumier de feuilles mortes ;
Feuilles, folioles, qu'un bon vent vous emporte
Vers les étangs par ribambelles,
Ou pour le feu du garde-chasse,
Ou les sommiers des ambulances
Pour les soldats loin de la France.

C'est la saison, c'est la saison, la rouille envahit les masses,
La rouille ronge en leurs spleens kilométriques
Les fils télégraphiques des grandes routes où nul ne passe.

Les cors, les cors, les cors - mélancoliques !...
Mélancoliques !...
S'en vont, changeant de ton,
Changeant de ton et de musique,
Ton ton, ton taine, ton ton !...
Les cors, les cors, les cors !...
S'en sont allés au vent du Nord.

Je ne puis quitter ce ton : que d'échos !...
C'est la saison, c'est la saison, adieu vendanges !...
Voici venir les pluies d'une patience d'ange,
Adieu vendanges, et adieu tous les paniers,
Tous les paniers Watteau des bourrées sous les marronniers
C'est la toux dans les dortoirs du lycée qui rentre,
C'est la tisane sans le foyer,
La phtisie pulmonaire attristant le quartier,
Et toute la misère des grands centres.

Mais, lainages, caoutchoucs, pharmacie, rêve,
Rideaux écartés du haut des balcons des grèves
Devant l'océan de toitures des faubourgs,
Lampes, estampes, thé, petits-fours,
Serez-vous pas mes seules amours !...
(Oh ! et puis, est-ce que tu connais, outre les pianos,
Le sobre et vespéral mystère hebdomadaire
Des statistiques sanitaires
Dans les journaux ?)

Non, non ! C'est la saison et la planète falote !
Que l'autan, que l'autan
Effiloche les savates que le Temps se tricote !
C'est la saison, oh déchirements ! c'est la saison !
Tous les ans, tous les ans,
J'essaierai en choeur d'en donner la note.

Jules Laforgue

Winter Coming On
(A caricature from Laforgue)

Fine feelings under blockade! Cargoes just in
from Kamschatka!
Rain falling and falling and night falling
And how the wind howls ...
Halloween, Christmas, New Year's Day
Sodden in drizzle - all my tall chimneys –
Industrial smoke through the rain!

No sitting down, all the park-benches are wet.
It's finished, I tell you, till next season.
Park-benches wet and all the leaves rust-eaten,
Horns and their echoes - dying, dying ...

Rally of rain-clouds! Procession from the Channel -
You certainly spoiled our last free Sunday.

Drizzles:
And in wet woods the spiders' webs
Weigh down with rain-drops: and that's their lot.
O golden delegates from harvest festivals,
Broad suns from cattle-shows,
Where have they buried you ?
This evening a sun lies, shagged, on top of the hill,
On a tramp's mattress, rags in the gorse -
A sun as white as a blob of spittle
On tap-room saw-dust, on a litter of yellow gorse,
Of yellow October gorse.
And the horns echo and call to him –
Come back! Won't you come back?

View halloo, Tally-ho ... Gone away.
O oratorio chorus, when will you be done?
Carrying on like mad things ...
And there he lies, like a torn-out gland on a neck,
Shivering, with no one by.

Tally-ho, then, and get on with it.
It's good old Winter coming, we know that.
By-passes empty, turnings on main roads
With no Red Riding Hood to be picked up.
Ruts from the wheels of last month's traffic-
Quixotic tram-lines to the rescue of
Cloud-patrols scurrying
Bullied by winds to transatlantic sheep-folds.
Get a move on, it's the well-known season
coming, now
And the wind last night, on top of its form,
Smashing suburban front-gardens - what a mess !
Disturbing my night's sleep with dreams of axes.

These branches, yesterday, had all their dead leaves -
Nothing but compost now, just lying about.
Dear leaves of various shapes and sizes
May a good breeze whirlpool you away
To lie on ponds, decorative,
To glow in the park-keeper's fire,
To stuff ambulance mattresses, comforts
For our soldiers overseas.

Time of year, time of year: the rust is eating,
The rust is gnawing long miles of ennui,
Telegraph-wires along main roads, deserted.
Horns, again horns... the echoes dying,
Dying...
Now changing key, going north
With the North Wind, Wagnerian,
Up to all those bloody skalds and Vikings...

Myself, I can't change key; too many echoes !
What beastly weather! Good-bye autumn,
good-bye ripeness ...
And here comes the rain with the diligence of an
angel.
Good-bye harvest, good-bye baskets for nutting,
And Watteau picnics under the chestnut trees.
It's barrack-room coughing again,
The landlady's horrible herbal tea –
It's TB in the garden suburb,
All the sheer misery of satellite towns.

Wellingtons, long underwear, cash chemists, dreams,
Undrawn curtains over verandas, shores
Of the red-brick sea of roofs and chimney-pots,
Lamp-shades, tea and biscuits, all the picture
papers -
You'll have to be my only loves!
(And known them, have you? ritual more portentous
Than the sad pianos tinkling through the dusk,
The registrar's returns of births and deaths,
In small type weekly in the press.)

No! It's the time of year, and this clown of a planet!
O please let the wind, let the high wind
Unknit the bed-socks Time is knitting herself!
Time of year, things tearing, time of year!
O let me every year, every year, just at this time
Join in the chorus, sound the right sour note.

Martin Bell

After Laforgue

In memory of Martin Bell

I have put a blockade on high-mindedness.
All night, through dawn and dead mid-morning,
Rain is playing rimshots on a bucket in the yard.
The weatherman tells me that winter comes on
As if he'd invented it. Fuck him.

Fuck sunshine and airports and pleasure.
Wind is deadheading the lilacs inland.
You know what this means. I could sing.
The weekend sailors deal the cards and swear.
The Channel is closed. This is good.

In the sopping, padlocked, broad-leaved shade
of money
Desperate lunches are cooking
In time for the afternoon furies and sudden
Divorces of debt from the means of production.
Good also. These counties are closed.

Myself, I imagine the north in its drizzle,
Its vanished smoke, exploded chimneys: home
In bad weather to hills of long hospitals, home
To the regional problems of number, home
To sectarian strife in the precincts of Sheffield and
Hartlepool,

Home from a world of late-liberal distraction
To rain and tenfoots clogged with leaves,
to the life's work of boredom and waiting,
The bus-station's just-closing teabar,
The icy, unpromising platforms of regional termini,

Home to dead docks and the vandalized showhouse.
Home for Mischief Night and Hallowe'en, their
little tales,
When the benches (the sodden repose of old
bastards in dog-smelling overcoats)
Vanish, when council employees dragged from
the pub
Will be dragging the lake in the park,

Watching their footprints fill up
And hating those whose bastard lives
Are bastard lived indoors. Home,
As Sunday extends towards winter, a shivery kiss
In a doorway, *Songs of Praise,* last orders. Home.

Rain, with an angel's patience, remind me.
This is not the world of Miss Selfridge and Sock
Shop,
Disposable income and lycra, illiterate hearsay
And just-scraping-in-after-Clearing to Business in
Farnham.
This world is not Eastbourne. It has no opinions.

In this world it rains and the winter
Is always arriving – rebirth of TB
And *The Sporting Green* sunk to the drainbed.
Here is the stuff that gets left in the gaps
Between houses – ambitious settees in black frogskin

And minibars missing their castors, the catalogues
Turning to mush, the unnameable objects
That used to be something with knobs on,
And now they live here, by the siding, the
fishhouse,
The building whose function is no longer known.

It is Londesborough Street with the roof gone –
That smell as the wallpaper goes, as it rains
On the landing, on pot dogs and photos
And ancient assumptions of upright servility.
Nothing is dry. The pillow-tick shivers

And water comes up through the scullery tiles
And as steam from the grate. There are funerals
Backed up the street for a mile
As the gravediggers wrestle with pumps and the
vicar
Attempts to hang on to his accent.

Rain, with an angel's patience, teach me
The lesson of where I came in once again,
With icy vestibules and rubber pillows,
The dick-nurse, the wet-smelling ash in the yard
And the bleary top deck like a chest-ward.

Teach me the weather will always be worsening,
With the arctic fleet behind it –
The subject of talk in the shop, at the corner,
Or thought of when stepping out into the yard
To the sirens of factories and pilot-boats,

There like a promise, the minute at nightfall
When rain turns to snow and is winter.

Sean O'Brien

The Beginning of Winter
(after Laforgue, Bell and O'Brien)

I will go numb until summer, how else
to get through the next five months of rain?
The weatherman has a special map of Britain
just for this – black clouds over every city
and three over London.

Outside, buses slur their reds over tarmac,
slick coats pass with no heads, their owners
bent double in the wind, hoping to be blown
home, where the smell of cabbage is a comfort,
where the news is full of war again,

children go missing, pensioners go blue,
corporations sink; plus the usual Christmas reruns:
Morecombe and Wise, Tommy Cooper, Bob Monkhouse,
still living inside the tv, the ghosts of the front room.
No shaking the dead – they're on every channel.

I sleep all day, like the cat, and dream of rain,
a world turned flood plain, the joke
of a god who invented global warming, only here
it isn't warm. The leafless trees glisten
their trucks silky with blackness.

And why go out? The shops are full
of jeans that are pre-distressed, with pre-made holes,
(and I think of the girl on tv shot
trying to leave the settlement, lying in the road),
and, of course, camouflage again.

It will never stop – the rain, the war,
the test match (in rerun), the refugee
sent back, the rebranding, the market research,
the Brazilian supermodel, the kickback,
the freedom fries, the disgraced MP.

The rain is almost pretty, hanging
in lacy drops from the handrail, and I think
of it raining over the hills and into valleys,
on the tin roofs of makeshift factories,
on the postman as he delivers the mail,

on the funeral procession, the delivery boy,
the wino in the doorway, the M25,
the 747, a man I used to love, and it's comforting,
the democracy of everything being drenched
at the same time. God, give me the strength

for Spring, all that chirping and newness,
baby bunnies, too much pink. Let winter last
forever, now that I have settled into
the dark afternoon and central heating and the sharp note
of the singer as he moves into a minor key.

Tamar Yoseloff

APPENDIX II

The following poems were written by Jan Baetens as a commentary on the work of various comic strip artists within the framework of an exhibition, *Self Service*, held from June to September 2001 as part of the Salao Lisboa de Illustraçao e Bandha Desenhado 2001. The translations of the texts were realised after much discussion with the author and are featured here to illustrate some of the points raised in my critical paper.

These poems posed many problems as they were highly referential, being used as an adjunct to visual material, and full of untranslatable puns and wordplay. A few excerpts from my email correspondence with Jan Baetens will, I hope, provide some insight into the type of considerations that any translator will have to take into account when working on any literary text, especially poetry, as well as the type of compromises that have to be reached. This also highlights, of course, how difficult the translator's job can be without recourse to the source-language author.

KRAZY KAT

L'un parle et l'autre cunéiforme.
L'autre case, les uns devant.
Sombre mezzanoche, savoureux
Carton-pâte mi-minaudant.
Tomber de rideau. Se lève
La prison, la lune tombe.
L'une, c'est tantôt un chat,
Tantôt l'autre. Le vieux m'aime
Par gattisme. Tire-toi. Pan.

KRAZY KAT

One speaks, the other cuneiform.
The other boxes, the ones before.
Dark *mezzanoche*, tasty
Semi-simpering pasteboard.
The curtain falls. The prison
Rises up, the moon sets.
One of them is sometimes a cat,
Sometimes the other. The loony old man thinks
I'm the cat's whiskers. Let's get shot of this place.
Bang.

The type of problem this poem raised: "case" - verb or noun? 'Caser' to screw/get married. "mezzanoche" – midnight? – what language? "Gattisme" - senility (gâtisme) + pun on Spanish for cat? Pan - Bang! or God Pan?

Email correspondence:

SR: What is the actual meaning of the first two lines? Is sound more important than sense? The wordplay particularly in the 2nd line is difficult to convey in English – what is paramount for you?
JB: ...I have tried to give a certain idea of the linguistic complexities of the text in Krazy Kat, a kind of colloquial English with wordplays in other languages, etc; the meaning is (more or less):
Line 1: The one speaks and the other "cuneiform"
(I know this makes no sense from a syntactical or grammatical point of view, since *cuneiform* should be a verb, but it is important to keep the "error"; the word *cuneiform* is an allusion to the visible language of Krazy Kat: you can not only read the words, but look at them as if they were oriental inscriptions...)
Line 2: The other places, the ones in front
(once again, a whole lot of syntactical errors which are absolutely crucial; the problem here for you as a translator is the wordplay on "case", which can be read as a verb – from "caser" – and as a noun, in that case it means the image of a comic book.
SR: Obviously the play on chat/gatto and l'une/lune will not work in English, so I will have to find other means of conveying the wordplay.
JB: I know, but since both the French and the English version will appear on the same page, this is not a catastrophe; please feel free to invent something analogous but completely different...
SR: Tire-toi – again the two meanings will probably not come across – which is more important? Presumably the idea of shooting, since the poem ends with 'Pan' (is there any reference intended to the pastoral god?).
JB: The meaning of shooting is essential, since "pan" is meant to be read in the first place as an onomatopoeia (the sound of the shooting, a much used onomatopoeia in comics, like BANG, WHAM, etc).

ALBERTO BRECCIA

La poule sans tête n'est pas un symbole,
Ce n'est pas un double sens non plus, malgré
Ses gros seins, c'est, pour peu qu'on y
regarde,
Même pas une vraie poule, enfin à peine.
Mettons que tu l'as faite avec du sang,
Une traînée de tulle, une paire de pinces,
Pourquoi pas un reste de cuisse de poulet,
Le tout soigneusement écrasé de ta main.
On jure que tes cadres pèsent cent tonnes.
Voilà les poulets qui arrivent. Rends-toi,
Crient-ils, mets-toi à table, coco, crache
L'aile qui te reste en travers de la gorge.

ALBERTO BRECCIA

The headless chick is not a symbol,
Nor does it have a double meaning, despite
Its large breasts, it is not, if we look at it,
Even a real chicken, or at least barely.
Suppose you made it with blood,
A trail of tulle, a couple of claws,
Why not the remains of a chicken thigh,
All painstakingly pulverised by you.
They swear your frames weigh a hundred tons.
Look, the pigs are here. Give yourself up,
They squeal, spill the beans, you Commie swine,
Spit out the wing sticking in your throat.

This poem worked on the extended use of idioms revolving around the word "poule" and "poulet", impossible to translate literally in English.

Email correspondence:

SR: The double meaning of "poule" is difficult to get across in English – we have "chick", which means girl (usually young and sexy!) but nothing that means "whore" as well. Does this matter?
JB: It does matter of course, but I think that with the word "chick" you have made a good choice… some lines further, you have "poulet", which means male chicken + police agent. I don't know if there is something that can be used instead of "cop" (when there's no other word, you should translate by cop, not chicken, which makes no sense).
SR: sang/tulle/paire de pinces – does all this refer to some type of collage technique? Can you elaborate on the ideas behind this?
JB: Yes, Breccia was an artist who used a different technique in each of his books, and who was the first to use collage techniques in his work.
SR: In the last few lines, with the wordplay on chickens/police, dining/spilling the beans, coco/communist/bird, what register is most important? I am not going to be able to keep these particular wordplays and will need to do something similar in English, so I need to know what exactly you want to bring out here.
JB: I'm awfully sorry to oblige you to translate such an "untranslatable" piece. The main idea is that of the cops/communists (Breccia was a very politicised artist).
SR: Is there any wordplay in the last line I am missing? What is the significance of the wing being stuck in the protagonist's throat?
JB: The wing is of course the wing of the chicken eaten by the person interrogated by the police (there is also a kind of ironic opposition between the rather poetic dimension of the word "aile" and the rather crude and brutal context).

MONSIEUR D.D.

Que je sache: une salle de café - et
Que l'on coupe, excusez-m'en,
Le mot comme une pomme de terre.

Coupe à boire tambour battant
Car tant de café lasse et par terre
Les losanges s'étoilent brisés.

Kammerspiel. Chez Rimbaud, zale
Kamin, ne trouve-t-on pas Wasserfall?
Le don des langues jamais ne sera

Pour ma pomme, ni le cassis.
Pas de porte que je ne franchis
Pas plus que la porte même.

MONSIEUR D. D.

As far as I know: a coffee bar - and
If you'll forgive me, let's cut
Up the word like a potato.

Lose no time in getting three parts cut
Since so much coffee gets tiresome and the tiles on
The floor are crazed and broken.

Kammerspiel. In Rimbaud, zat
Filzy boy, don't we find Wasserfall?
The gift of languages has never been

My cup of tea, nor has French *cassis*.
There is no door I will not go through
Except for those doors themselves.

Email correspondence:

SR: What are the references to coffee/language in the first two stanzas?
JB: "café" means two things here: first of all the bar, which is the setting of the poem; but also "coffee", the wordplay being provoked by the two means of the word "coupe" (glass/cut). I'm afraid that in all the cases you'll have to make a choice.
In fact the most important thing in this poem are the sounds, more particularly the alliterations (KKL, KKL KKL, PPP) and the rimes.
Please note that "zale kamin" is the "German pronunciation" of "sale gamin" (the shifts between languages is induced by the Kafka-intertext of Deprez' work, and also by the multilingualism of Belgium, Deprez being a clearly "Belgian" artist.
SR: Can you throw some light on the references to the German language and Rimbaud?
JB: For the German: supra. Rimbaud is the poet who first used the German word "wasserfall" in one of his poems, that's all.

EN TOUCHANT UNE PAGE
DE VINCENT FORTEMPS

Alors que tous mes essais,
Mes rages, mes repentirs,
Mes ratures, désespoirs,
Fausses illusions, les uns
Après les autres se jettent
Et que jamais palimpseste
N'a débordé d'autant d'encre
Que ma corbeille à papier,
Une forme là s'égoutte
Jusqu'à l'équilibre, sans
Cesser comme le mercure
Muet ou l'aile d'un oiseau
Qui suinte et souffre, de me
Vriller l'oeil lèvres cousues.

TOUCHING ON A PAGE
BY VINCENT FORTEMPS

While all my endeavours,
My rages, my regrets,
My failures, my despairs,
False illusions, are thrown
Out in close succession
And while no palimpsest
Has ever welled over
With as much ink as my
Wastepaper bin, a form
Drains there until balanced
Maintaining like speechless
Mercury or the wing
Of a bird that drips and
Suffers, its piercing stare
With its lips tightly sealed.

Email correspondence:

SR: In terms of form, although your poems has 14 7-syllable lines, this is number of syllables is difficult... At present, I have 15 6-syllable lines – does this matter?
JB: No, that does not matter. The only thing that really matters is that there is a clearly recognizable rhythmic pattern.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Baudelaire, Charles, *Complete Verse* (London, Anvil Press Poetry, 1986)

Baudelaire, Charles, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, translation by Richard Howard (London, Everyman's Library, 1993)

Baudelaire, Charles, *Les Fleurs du Mal, Petits poèmes en prose, Les paradis artificiels*, translated by Arthur Symons, (London, The Casanova Society, 1925)

Catullus, *The Poems of Catullus*, translated by James Michie (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969)

Caulfield, Patrick and Sean O'Brien, *The Poems of Jules Laforgue* (London, South Bank Centre, 1995)

Eco, Umberto, *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003)

Hamilton, Ian, *Robert Lowell, A Biography* (London, Faber & Faber Ltd, 1983)

Hofstadter, Douglas R., *Le Ton Beau de Marot* (New York, Basic Books, 1997)

Laforgue, Jules, *Poems*, translated by Peter Dale (London, Anvil Press Poetry Ltd, 2001)

Lowell, Robert, *Imitations* (New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1989)

Millay, Edna St Vincent, Dillon, George, *Flowers of Evil* (New York, London, Harper & Bros., 1936)

O'Brien, Sean, *Cousin Coat: Selected Poems, 1976–2001* (London, Picador, 2002)

O'Grady, Desmond, *Trawling Tradition* (University of Salzburg, 1994)

Paterson, Don, *The Eyes* (London, Faber and Faber Ltd, 1999)

Paul, David, *Poison and Vision, The Poems and Prose of Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Rimbaud* (University of Salzburg, 1996)

Penguin Modern Poets 3: *George Barker, Martin Bell, Charles Causely* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1962)

Raffel, Burton, *The Art of Translating Poetry* (University Park and London, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988)

Self-Service (Brussels, Fréon Éditions, 2001)

Articles in Books and Journals

Bassnett, Susan, 'The Value of Comparing Translations', *ITI Bulletin* (July–August 2003)

Baudelaire, Charles, 'Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe', in *Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires par Edgar Poe*, Troisième Edition (Paris, Michel Lévy Frères, 1862)

Bonnefoy, Yves, 'Translating Poetry' in *PN Review 46* (Cambridge Poetry Festival Special Issue) vol. 12, no. 2, 1985), translated from French by John Alexander and Clive Wilmer

Connolly, David, 'Poetry Translation', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* ed. Mona Baker (London and New York: Routledge, 1998)

Eliot, T S, 'The music of Poetry', in *On Poetry and Poets* (London, Faber and Faber Ltd, 1969)

Ellis, Roger and Liz Oakley-Brown, 'British Tradition', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. Mona Baker (London and New York: Routledge, 1998)

Gunn, Thom, 'Imitations and Originals', in *The Yale Review* (vol. 51, no. 3, Spring 1962)

Heaney, Seamus, 'The Impact of Translation', in *The Government of the Tongue* (London, Faber & Faber Ltd, 1988)

Lawson, Sarah, 'Translating Jacques Prévert's Wordplay', in *In Other Words* (London, The Society of Authors, Summer 2003, no. 21)

Robinson, Douglas, 'Imitation', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. Mona Baker (London and New York: Routledge, 1998)

Sontag, Susan, 'The World as India', in *TLS* (June 13 2003)

Venuti, Lawrence, 'Strategies of Translation', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. Mona Baker (London and New York: Routledge, 1998)

Weissbort, Daniel, 'A Ciceronian Up Against it!', in *PN Review* (vol. 30, no. 5, May–June 2004)

Miscellaneous Sources

Catullus, Walter Raleigh, Thomas Campion, Ben Johnson, Richard Crashaw in 'The Wondering Minstrels', 2004, [http://www.cs.rice.edu/~ssiyer/minstrels/index.html], 29 April 2004

Chadwick, Charles, 'French Symbolism', 2003, [http://skku.ac.kr/~leems/FrenchSymbolism.hmtl.htm], 22.03.2004

Dr Grahame Davies, 'Sleeping with the Enemy: the Tensions of Literary Translation', at *The Politics of Literary Translation* conference, University of Glamorgan, 28 June 2003

Heaney, Seamus, with Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Readings & Conversations', 1 October 2003, [http://www.lannan.org/_authors/heaney/SHeaney_Conversation.pdf], 6 April 2004

Heaney, Seamus, in conversation with Tim Marlow, *Newsnight Review* (2 April 2004)

Yoseloff, Tamar, 'The Beginning of Winter (after Laforgue, Bell and O'Brien)', unpublished, 2004